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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the four quarterly issues of the journal "Understanding Our Gifted" published during 1997. Each issue of this journal generally has a single theme in the education of gifted and talented children around which all the articles are focused. The themes of these four issues are, respectively, "Perfectionism," "Gifted Education and the Law," "Looking inside Giftedness," and "Learning Differences." Major articles are: "Life: We're In It for the Long Run" (Jim Delisle); "How To Select Educational Software" (Pat Melton); "Dealing with Perfectionism: Piaget's Dynamic Equilibrium" (LeoNora Cohen); "Perfectionism for the School Years into Adulthood: Continuing Challenges" (Sandra K. Howell); "The Perfectionist" (Monique Lloyd); "The Evolving Legal Framework in Gifted Education" (Frances A. Karnes and others); "Civil Rights for Gifted: The Emerging Role of the Office for Civil Rights" (Debra A. Troxclair); "Content Acceleration for High School Students: States-Supported Legislation" (Carol R. McCarthy); "Above & Beyond...The Legal Right To Be Educated" (Susan Winebrenner); "Homeschooling the Gifted...A Personal Introduction" (Deborah Haydock); "Gifted Children: The Heart of the Matter" (Jim Delisle); "The Pursuit of Quality: Advanced Education Program in Las Cruces Schools" (Sandra Lowry and Sara Norris); "When Children Come Home: The Process of DeSchooling" (Kathleen Schon); "Above & Beyond...The Interior World of Gifted Youngsters" (Susan Winebrenner); "Riddle Me This" (Priscilla Vail); "Reading Disorders and the Gifted Child" (Betsy Kutrumbos and Gerri Masson); "The Gifted/Syntopical Thinker" (Cal Roberts); "Creative Ventures...Happy Birthday, Cinderella" (Jerry Flack); and "Above and Beyond...Gifted Students Learn Differently from Age Peers" (Susan Winebrenner). (Some articles contain references.) (DB)

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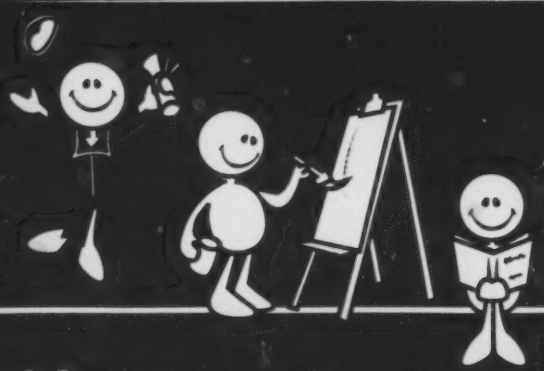

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Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

Fall, 1996 Volume 9, Issue 1

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PERFECTIONISM

At the Frontiers of Gifted Lives & Learning

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Focus on Perfectionism

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Between the Lines

Change is inherent, evident in everything in life from clothing and hair styles to last year's child becoming this year's adolescent to individual shifts in philosophical belief systems. With this issue, *Understanding Our Gifted* institutes some changes of its own, both cosmetic and more substantive in nature.

It's hard to miss our new cover design, and a quick thumbing through the journal will show that we've also chosen new fonts and revamped the page layouts. With wider columns, Sandra Berger, regular contributor of "Surfing the Net," now has a better chance of seeing her URLs spelled out on one line. And for those readers and contributors who have so often asked for no multiple-page jumps in the continuation of articles, now there are none.

We've expanded the now-quarterly journal into a longer format, and the added pages provide room for stretching out. We now have the space in which those less apparent and more challenging changes, the substantive ones of scope and depth, can flourish. As a leading journal for parents and educators of gifted children, *Understanding Our Gifted* enters its ninth year of publication as committed as ever to bringing information, understanding and resources to the people who live and work with gifted children. We're dedicated to offering a balance of emphasis between affective and academic areas, with our primary focus on the total child — social/emotional, intellectual, psychological and physical aspects.

More pages offer the opportunity to present even more diverse points of view, both professional and personal, as well as to go more deeply into topics of interest concerning the gifted community. In this issue's extra pages we're able to welcome an array of pieces by parents, teachers and consultants Jim Delisle, Monique Lloyd and Pat Melton, while on the focus theme of perfectionism, LeoNora Cohen and Sandy Howell have taken their compelling ideas and opinions to the next and deeper level. Familiar names remain, though not always in familiar contexts. Jerry Flack, our resident expert on creativity, exercises this new flexibility in offering a review of the biography of "the father of creativity," E. Paul Torrance. These changes and this issue are only the beginning; we like to think the possibilities are endless.

As we stand looking toward the millennium and the untold changes it holds for us all, we at *Understanding Our Gifted* wish to extend our thanks to you, our readers and contributors, for being part of our lives with gifted children and for allowing us to be a part of yours. Because we learn so much from you, just as we all learn from the gifted young people who so enrich our lives, we welcome as always your insights and opinions and encourage you to continue sharing them with us. It's the promise and hope of these special youngsters that give us cause to keep changing and making changes in order to support and enhance their passage from gifted children to gifted adults.

Dorothy Knopper & Laura Goodman

Life: We're In It For the Long Run

Jim Delisle

When I received my Ph.D. at age 28, my parents, neither of whom held college degrees, decided to give me a graduation party. All my relatives attended, including Aunt Peggy, my "weddings and funerals" Aunt whom I see on only the happiest and saddest of occasions.

Aunt Peggy told me the usual: that she was proud of me, that I should be proud of myself, and that my life would be successful. Then, as only she can do, Aunt Peggy added a caveat: "Jim...you could've become a *real* doctor." Then, adding ever so casually: "You know what I mean. The kind of doctor who really helps people."

Gee, thanks, Aunt Peggy!

Seven books, 200 published articles and a wonderful family later, I remain an "underachiever" in Aunt Peggy's eyes. And, from her perspective, an underachiever I will always be, because I didn't fit her image of what a gifted kid like myself should have become.

My guess is that each of you has met your own personal Aunt Peggy (or Uncle Ray, her spouse, who told me in 8th grade that I was "too smart to become a teacher" when I expressed an interest in that career). So have your kids. Each time they receive a comment like, "Four A's and two B's aren't bad, but..." or "I'm glad you're interested in the arts, but...", they realize they're disappointing someone whose benchmark for success differs from their own. These kicks in the butt preclude anyone from relishing a long-sought goal or a hard-won success. Instead, they focus on what could have been or what was missing. Eventually, children and adults who receive a constant barrage of suggestions that they have not quite grasped the Carousel of Life's golden ring will become *their own* Aunt Peggys, extolling the virtues of everyone's actions but their own.

Where does perfectionism come from? It's hard to say. But I have no doubt that I know what precipitates its growth: external and internal comments that reflect less on what goals you hit and more on the ones you miss.

What can parents and educators do to prevent this most disabling of psychological conditions in an otherwise healthy person? Here are a few suggestions:

1. See the Big Picture

Professional baseball players yearn for a .400 batting average—which means they would strike or hit out 60 % of the time! Yet no one sees a .400 batting average as bad—quite the reverse.

- *continued on next page*

***Jim Delisle** is a Professor at Kent State University in Ohio and a part-time 5th-6th grade enrichment teacher. His latest two books are Growing Good Kids (with Deb Delisle) and The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook (with Judy Galbraith).*

Life
Continued

Translated for kids, this means that even if they *did* fail a test (or get a "B"), did not make first chair in band or the starting five in basketball, they should *still* consider what they did achieve and, more importantly, what their record of success is over the long run.

2. Reward Attempts, Not Just Successes
Many children (and adults) will voluntarily participate in activities only if they can be assured of initial success. Especially true for gifted students who achieve highly and readily, the prospect of entering the "discomfort zone" of possible loss or defeat is enough to make many say "No, thank you." By declining the chance to participate, people also relinquish their ability to learn. The result? Smart high school students avoid A.P. English for fear that they won't earn an A; middle school students give up taking instrument lessons because they can't master a piece of music flawlessly. You get the picture — in fact, you may know it well: we prefer doing things that guarantee success *by our personal standard* (or worse, Aunt Peggy's), eschewing other opportunities that may not afford us the luxury of being #1.

Addressing this problem can occur every day. For example: tell your child (or yourself) that you're going to try something out "just for the fun of it." If you succeed, that's good; and if you don't, that's good, too. Or, before looking at a child's report card, ask her what she *learned* rather than what she *earned*. In other words, investigate what your child has learned during the previous nine weeks of school, concentrating on the entity that remains long after the grade has been recorded: knowledge. Finally, why not share some times in your *own* life when you took a risk — physical, intellectual, emotional — and review what lessons this excursion into the unknown taught you. Can't remember the last time you took such a risk? Now...what does *that* tell you about role modeling for your child, hmmm...?

Hockey great Wayne Gretsky once remarked that "you miss 100% of the shots you don't take." If kids (and adults) are to lead full lives, they'll need the courage to challenge their own abilities and conquer their fears.

3. Be Careful With Praise
In an era in which the mere fact that you show up for school seems to earn you a scratch-and-sniff sticker, many children become so dependent on praise that its absence makes them feel like failures. What is so damaging about effusive praise is its addictive nature — the more you get, the more you want. The result after several years of smiley faces, gold stars and "great work!" comments? A child who looks to others, not himself, as the ultimate source of gratification. Even worse, once the positive flow of praise comments and objects slows to a trickle, children have few, if any, internal resources upon which to decide whether a deed they did is truly meritorious, just OK or lousy.

The remedy? Start early. Instead of handing out praise indiscriminately, ask for your *child's* evaluation of his or her work. "What do you think?" or "What did *you* learn?" or "What parts of your project did you like especially well?" are much more relevant and important questions than are comments like "Great job!" or "Perfect!" So, hold off on the praise by substituting it with statements like "I appreciate your effort," or "This assignment seems very important to you." Such statements prompt further discussion, whereas praise statements tend to put an end to all dialogue.

Now...back to Aunt Peggy. I have long realized that human beings were provided with two ears for good reason: so that some comments can go in one and directly out the other, not stopping in the middle — your brain, your psyche — at all. You see, to Aunt Peggy, and people like her, I will always be less than a success. And even if I had become the *real* doctor she had hoped I would, I'm convinced I would have chosen pediatrics as my profession.

...Aunt Peggy's would-be comment at *that* graduation party? "There's more money in surgery...more prestige in cardiology."

You get the picture. Now...erase it as soon as possible! ❖

ParentSpace

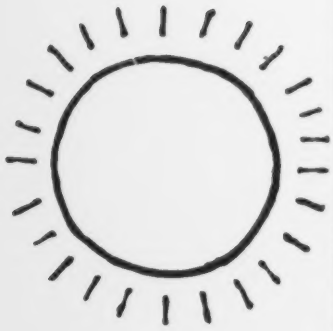
Laura Goodman

The Summer Boy

SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM! If I could find one, I'd plaster that old bumper sticker across the back of my car. Maybe my head. Because that's just what our family has done.

The seeds of our subversion were sown in early summer. We stretched a four-day business trip to Geneva into three weeks of travel in Switzerland, France and London. The three of us — Dad, Mom and the 10-year-old — took in everything we could possibly manage to see, hear, touch, smell, taste and do. A grand little tour! On a train coming down from the Jungfrau, a friendly grandfather from Kentucky asked my son what was the earliest age he thought children could benefit from travel in Europe. My son's reply was prompt. "Maybe 8," he said, "but 10 is *perfect*!" It sure was for him, anyway.

This boy's always had the extraordinary ability to take in, process, then integrate and use what he encounters as he moves through the world. But this seemed like more. To hear him picking up French from vendors and waiters and listening to Europeans speak to their dogs was something else. He would have been fluent in three months. His split-second money conversions were wonders; we shook our heads knowing that back home he would have bucked and balked at a page of math problems like those. Then, as we all walked, mouths gaping, through the 12th-century cathedral in Chartres he whispered to me that only right then did he truly understand the meaning of the word "awestruck." Language, cultures, history, geography, math, art, architecture. There was no end of it for him; it all went in, and he couldn't get enough.



At home again, he and his summer got better and better, the best ever. He was living with the throttle wide open and loving it, but in the early days of August I began to get nervous about school. This child's gifts are intellectual, *not* academic, and over the last year we'd watched him cloaking a good bit of that intellect in order to fit in with his "crowd of choice." He'd thrown over any semblance of caring about academics, doing his schoolwork with his feet it seemed, holding his nose and griping bitterly. Nevertheless, his grades were fine, but he'd grown increasingly negative about learning or being taught anything by anyone. His teachers hated him, he told us, and he them. By the end of last school year, nearly everyone in his life — his parents, adult friends, the teachers and administrator at his school, therapists, all had mobilized to help him and stop the slide. Everyone, that is, except the young man himself, and he didn't care. It wasn't a bit pretty. But summer came and with it our remarkable trip, and our boy came back to us.

Here the story gets long, the details too numerous to list, but the

- *continued on next page*

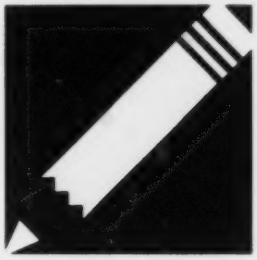
***Laura Goodman** is a fiction writer, editor and mother of a gifted child, not necessarily in that order.*

climax is that September came and we took him out of school after two days. We couldn't bear to watch as our boy climbed back inside himself to that dark, negative place where he goes when we're all trying to make the multi-dimensional, rough-hewn peg that he is fit into that round, smooth-sided little hole called school. It hurts my heart now to think what a lonely and painful place that must be. And because we couldn't live with sending him down there again, we brought our son home for good. We do school a different way now, we tell anyone who asks.

We want that summer boy with us all year round, the one who leaped and laughed and learned French out of the air, who did math effortlessly, who gave himself to words at the molecular level. As a family, we subverted what is one of the most dominant of American paradigms: school as education. John Taylor Gatto, award-winning teacher and writer, makes the critical distinction between schooling, which is what happens in American schools, and an education, which is accomplished in living and profiting from a full life. It's *an education* our son seems determined to have and which we want for him. Thanks to those phenomenal capabilities to process and integrate and use whatever he finds around himself, I see how this child began educating himself in meaningful, momentous ways from his earliest days. I finally understand that school was always in his way; it tripped him up, beat him down and sent him home with the message that he wasn't so great at doing what he'd been doing brilliantly on his own for years: learning.

We'll try to stay out of his way, capitalize on his strengths, develop and refine and use them as we proceed together through our new and personalized paradigm of education. We'll do it at home and out in the world, though field trips to Paris or Stratford-on-Avon aren't essential. We'll do our learning walking down neighborhood streets and along nearby streams, tramping through fields, riding in the car, going to museums and lectures and concerts, sitting in courtrooms, cruising stacks in libraries and aisles in hardware stores, from people we know and those we haven't met yet. We'll let him learn as he does best and as he loves, by living and doing and making connections, by discovering answers to his own questions. We'll all be much the better for it; in fact, though it's only been a few months, we already are. ❖

Parents: Write it up!



Call for Submissions

Interested in voicing your concerns, your successes, your gripes or your own perspective on life with gifted and talented children? Here's a chance to say what you think and see your words in print. For publication in ParentSpace, submit an essay of 500 to 1000 words on any aspect of parenting the gifted. Please include a brief bio and how best to contact you.

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Surfing the Net

Sandra Berger

Ask the Experts

Are you an online "wanna-be?" You wanna be there but taking that first step is something you've put off?

Thanks to the proliferation of commercial services, an Internet connection with access to the world's biggest library is just a dial, point and click away. A recent survey by a University of Pennsylvania graduate student revealed that at least 600,000 Americans have their own World Wide Web personal home page, approximately 1 in 16 Internet users. The number of Internet users has risen to a guesstimate of 30 million. Although these numbers are impressive by themselves, the number of connections represents a vast new resource and a method of communication that's here to stay.

The Internet is a vast network of computers linked together with no central hub, no starting point, no stopping point and no borders. It was originally designed so that no one portion, if damaged or destroyed, could have the effect of bringing the whole thing to a halt. Equipped with a computer, a modem and proper software, individuals across the globe are capable of connecting to the Internet and communicating with one another. The services provided are virtually limitless, ranging from electronic mail (e-mail), perhaps the most popular, to online reference libraries.

Not too long ago, a homework project meant a trip in the family car to the nearest library and a tedious search through card catalogs or, in many cases, a frantic search through home reference books because the project had been put off until the night before it was due. Now, an Internet connection provides access to numerous online reference libraries and experts on a wide variety of topics. The experts range from other parents and teachers to well-known scientists. In some cases, finding an expert is as simple as finding someone who has had some experience in solving a problem you might have. Participation in an e-mail discussion group, or listserv, can bring a wealth of information to your mailbox. Anyone can subscribe to a listserv by simply mailing a "subscribe" message to the administrative address. Once you have subscribed, any e-mail letter sent to the list's address is copied and mass-mailed to the e-mail box of every person subscribed to the list. Everyone else on the list can then reply to that letter. Listserv lists give you a way to have open discussions with dozens or even hundreds of people on a myriad of topics. Best of all, it is all done through e-mail. People interested in gifted children or gifted education can subscribe to several listservs. Because of the rapidly changing nature of computer technology, we update information continually. If you refer to past issues, always check the most recent "Surfing the Net" in *Understanding Our Gifted*.

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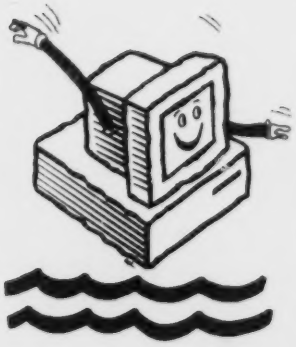

***Sandra Berger** is the Information Specialist for Gifted Education at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education in Reston, Virginia. She is the author of College Planning for Gifted Students.*

Surfing the Net
continued

LISTSERVS

G-TOT-L: Topics related to very young children (generally under 6 years old) who are gifted
List address: listproc@eskimo.com
TAG-L: General discussion about all topics related to gifted children
List address: listserv@sjuvm.stjohns.edu
TAGFAM: Discussion and support list for families of TAG or G/T children
List address: listserv@sjuvm.stjohns.edu
GIFTEDNET-L: Science and Language Arts Curriculum Projects for High Ability Learners.
List address: listserver@listserv.cc.wm.edu
U-ACHIEV: Academic underachievement and underachieving students, including gifted
List address: majordomo@virginia.edu

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2. Leave the subject line blank.
3. In the body of the message, type "SUBSCRIBE LISTNAME Your-first-name Your-last-name." For example: Subscribe TAG-L Albert Einstein. Majordomo lists require your e-mail address, not your first and last name.
4. Send the message. Wait for and read the reply from the group's computer and follow any additional instructions.

Do you have a child who wants to know how magnifying glasses make things bigger? Or how yeast makes bread rise? Or why hair gets curly when the humidity goes up. Perhaps you want to talk to an expert in astronomy or geology. Electronic mail, combined with World Wide Web sites, provides access to experts on almost any topic. In a recent surfing expedition, I found some interesting sites that provide lots of information along with an e-mail address for questions. Their URLs and brief descriptions are listed below. (URLs are Uniform Resource Locators, somewhat like your street address in that they tell you the address of the resource. You then have to type the address in the proper location. If you don't know where or how to type a URL, contact your Internet Service Provider and ask for technical assistance.)

Pitsco Resources for Teachers
URL: http://www.askanexpert.com/p/resource.html
A commercial site that offers a mind-boggling assortment of resources on everything from Architecture and Astronomy to Women Artists and Zoology. It is a primary launch site for asking an expert, and provides over 400 web sites and e-mail addresses with curriculum resources and experts to answer your questions. When you get to the Pitsco Home Page, click on "Ask an Expert" and then click on one of the many menu choices. Many of the experts have posted responses to previously asked questions. For example, one of the astronomy sites offers 43 different questions and responses about the phases of the moon. (I got hooked on this site, so I suggest that you visit when you have lots of time to browse.) Need a geodesic dome kit? The Pitsco folks also offer a catalog of their products.

Internet Public Library: IPL Ask a Question
URL: http:/aristotle.sils.umich.edu/ref/QUE/ This site offers two different ways to ask a question: e-mail or completing an on-line form. The IPL reference staff will help you get started with some ideas and places to begin if you have a big project, but like most sites that offer a question-answering service, they can't perform lengthy research for you. The answer that you receive will take the form of a brief factual answer to a specific question or a short list of sources that you might use to further explore your topic.They also offer a "Frequently Asked Reference Questions List," where they have posted previously asked questions and their responses. Want to know when the 21st century really begins? In the year 2000 or 2001? Just type the URL, and press your keyboard space bar until you come to that question. (On the World Wide Web, you use your keyboard arrows and space bar to travel through a document.)

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Kids Web - A World Wide Web Digital Library for Schoolkids
URL: http://www.npac.syr.edu/textbook/kidsweb/
Kids Web is part of the Syracuse University Living Schoolbook Project, and offers information in four broad areas—Arts, Sciences, Social Studies and Miscellaneous—along with links to lots of other education resources. Each broad area is subdivided into academic subjects. For example, the Sciences menu offers Astronomy and Space, Biology and Life Sciences, Chemistry, Computers, Environmental Science, Geology and Earth Sciences, Mathematics and Physics. Just click on any area. Geology offers a question-answering service, "Ask-A-Geologist."

Ask An Expert
URL: http://njnie.dl.stevens-tech.edu/curriculum aska.html
This site is another primary link to Ask-an-Expert home pages. The Science and Technology menu choice leads to 30 other sites where you can get answers to questions. Want to find out how dolphins communicate? This is the resource for you.

Are you convinced that the Internet is the world's largest information resource? If you are still an online "wanna-be" looking for an expert, I hope you will soon find a local Internet Service Provider that provides full-access to the Internet. Some of the commercial services have grown so popular that people have difficulty connecting, so if you choose a commercial provider, sign up for a trial subscription. If you spend lots of time listening to busy signals, find another provider. And be sure to wave when you see me on the Net. ❖

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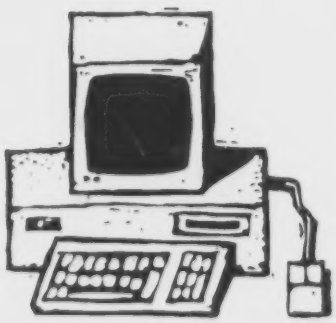
How to Select Educational Software

Pat Melton

In the last five years, there has been an explosion of new software for children. Some of it is good; however, a lot of it isn't. More and more you find your children are vying for time on your personal computer, and spreadsheets and word processors just don't keep them interested. By the time you read this, a raft of new packages will be appearing for the holiday season. How do you wade through 400 applications, complete with interesting packaging and awards from several official-sounding organizations? Here are a few tips to help guide you in your purchase:

1. Configure your machine properly. Today's educational software, with it's high-end graphics, sound and video, demands a machine with plenty of resources. You should have at least 16MB of memory, a sound card, a CD-ROM, a high resolution color monitor and a 1GB disk drive.

2. Do your research. Select subjects, such as math, science or reading for which you wish to purchase software. Ask other parents, kids and teachers about their favorite packages. You may want to match software that your child is using in school. If possible, see a demo of the software first. Stores or companies that feature educational software, or even contain computer labs for kids, can tell you about favorite packages. Read reviews in computing magazines. Certain software companies, such as Broderbund, Learning Company, Edmark, Sierra and Davidson have a track record for producing quality products. Demo copies are also available on CD-ROM and on the Internet.



3. Select programs that will run on your computer. Read the box carefully for system requirements. For example, the box will indicate operating system levels, such as "MAC OS 7.0" or "Windows 95," at which the program will run. If the software indicates a recommended and a minimum memory level, use the recommended memory level. For example, if the requirements recommend 8MB of memory, but will run on 4MB minimum, you should have an 8MB system; you will not be happy with the performance level at 4MB. If you don't have a CD-ROM drive, get one; most educational software is now available only on CD-ROM.

4. Select software that will match your child's ability. Most packages will indicate an age range, such as 6-12, for which the software is appropriate. Packages that will run at multiple levels of difficulty will last the longest and keep your child interested. Since the advertising may be misleading, your research will be helpful here.

5. Look for appeal while maintaining educational value. Playful programs with animation, sound and graphics will hold your child's interest, but also should have adequate levels of learning. A program's flexibility and open-endedness are more important

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***Pat Melton** is a computer consultant, instructor and musician in Colorado. She is the parent of a gifted child who has personally tested numerous pieces of software, and who suggested some tips found in this article.*

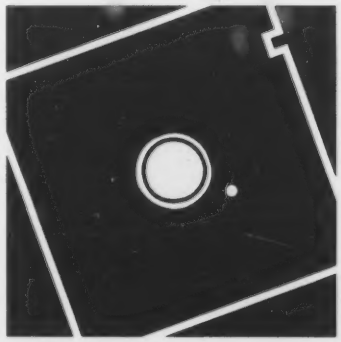
in the long run. Look for software that develops creativity, communication and thinking skills, while involving the child as an interactive participant.

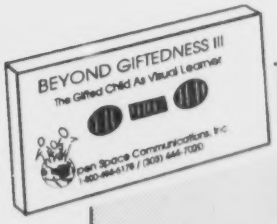
6. Be sure your child can use the software independently. Software that is confusing will be frustrating for parent and child and may not allow your child to progress at his or her own speed. Software should feature buttons with useful labels, intuitive interface, clear commands and (for parents) a user's guide if you get stuck. Pre-reading software, for example, should not contain commands that require reading. Parents will want to be involved, showing support and interest in the subject, without using packages that require constant parental maintenance.

7. Look for positive feedback. Software is a wonderful educational tool because each child can proceed at his or her own pace in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. The package should include plenty of positive feedback for correct answers and "try again" types of messages for wrong answers. In the best packages, the result of a wrong answer is just as entertaining as that of the right one.

8. Choose packages that can also be used away from the computer. Software that allows children to create banners, cards, storybooks, paper hats and even origami continue to reinforce learning long after the computer is turned off.

9. Rely on your child's feedback. If your youngster loses interest quickly in a package for which you've just spent $50, you will want to get feedback about what was "yucky" or "boring" about it. If your child returns again and again to a package, you'll also want to find out what he or she likes. This will increase your chances of selecting appropriate software in the future. ❖





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Focus

Dealing with Perfectionism: Piaget's Dynamic Equilibrium

LeoNora Cohen

***LeoNora Cohen** is Professor and Chair, Curriculum and Instructional Studies, University of Akron, Ohio. She has taught at University of Oregon, Oregon State University and University of Melbourne, Australia, working in the field of gifted education for almost 30 years as teacher, gifted program coordinator, researcher and university professor. Her publications include Coping for Capable Kids, co-authored with her Australian colleague Erica Frydenberg.*

Perfectionism is a problem facing many gifted individuals. The problem arises in our making extremely high demands on ourselves for flawless products and sometimes in having overly high expectations of others (Adderholt-Elliot, 1987; Cohen & Frydenberg, 1996; Delisle, 1992; Parker & Adkins, 1995; Whitmore, 1980). Silverman (1991) calls perfectionism one of the three great emotional tributaries of the gifted personality. She notes that on the one hand, perfectionism has its positive aspects, since it induces a drive towards excellence. However, the downside of perfectionism may cause paralysis—the inability or unwillingness to tackle anything that might make us look less than perfect. Paralyzing perfectionism may be derived from messages from significant adults who tell us when we are young that we are not good enough. It may also arise from our own belief systems. Dweck (1995) has found that if we believe intelligence is based on innate abilities (entity theory), then we think there is a limit on what we can do and we are afraid to reveal our deficiencies. Therefore, if we are identified as gifted, we fear we do not merit the label. We blame ourselves for failures and tell ourselves we cannot do something challenging. We believe we should not have to work hard, since our intellects should make learning effortless. Yet we want to look smart and perfect, so we select safe, easy tasks and focus on perfecting a product. If, on the other hand, we think that intelligence is a potential that increases through effort (incremental theory), then we tell ourselves that we will succeed if we work hard and we blame failures on external factors. With incremental beliefs, we are less likely to be paralyzed perfectionists, since we are energized by difficulties and use them for growth, enjoy the challenge of effort and relish the process of learning.

Manifestations of perfectionism are evident in the behaviors of the following children, all of whom have been identified as gifted and attend a school for the academically talented.

- *Inability to finish:* Amanda, an 8th grader, is a voracious, quick-start style learner. She starts a research project with great enthusiasm, collects all the information on note cards, puts together a rough draft, but cannot get herself to complete a final copy because she believes it will never be good enough. Not completing it keeps her secret safe.
- *Delayed start:* Jeffrey, a sociable 5th grader, puts off getting started on most things and then generally does a sloppy job when he does finally get to work. He put off beginning his math project, a fraction game, until the very last minute. Two days before the assignment is due, he tells his mother he needs poster board and hastily works out his game, saying to himself that it wasn't as good as he could have done if he'd had more than two days.
- *Unwillingness to share work:* Omar, a 4th grader, is shy, dislikes being compared to other students and seems to operate from the personal sense that others do things better than he. He is a prolific writer of stories but can't get himself to read them to the class.

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• *Refusal to turn in work:* At 10, Annie is scrupulous about her hair, clothes and much else in her life. Her mother is puzzled and concerned about a note saying Annie is missing many homework assignments and assures the teacher that her daughter faithfully completes everything. Annie doesn't turn them in; she'd rather be penalized for not doing them than demonstrate what she considers to be less than satisfactory work.
• *Great dissatisfaction with product or frustration at inability to accomplish a goal:* An extremely artistic and creative 1st grader, Liz tears up one art paper after another because her picture of a horse isn't exactly how she envisions it in her mind. She erases until the paper has holes, then sobs, "I can't draw at all." The discrepancy between concept and what she is physically able to accomplish is overwhelming for the 6 year old.
• *Inability to tolerate mistakes:* Alicia, an extraordinarily bright and sensitive 4th grader who sets the highest of expectations for herself, bursts into tears when she has one word wrong on her spelling test.
• *Impatience with others' imperfections:* Jamal is a 5th-grade leader who possesses clarity of vision about how things ought to be. In creating a scaled map on a piece of plywood, he becomes very impatient with his partner's lack of measuring skill. He tells the teacher, "I can't work with Robbie. He doesn't get the lines right, and it's going to ruin the map."

As adults, we also see excessive need for perfection in ourselves, as when we over-plan a party or vacation, demand that our children get A's on report cards or insist on an immaculate house even when there are active young children in the family. Paralyzing perfectionism is also evident in not submitting manuscripts for review or, worse, when we don't even write down the ideas to begin the pieces. There is always the fear that others might see us as less than perfect, because deep inside we know how imperfect we are.

Being a perfectionist poses an even greater problem in today's world. Getting ideas out quickly and efficiently is more important in this information age, as the world's knowledge continues to increase exponentially. With less luxury of time, we need to *encourage the focus on the process of learning, rather than on perfect products.* Some major companies know this and encourage workers to make mistakes and learn from them. One forward-thinking school of medicine has a course on ignorance, explaining that "50% of what medical students learn today will be found to be wrong in 10 years" (Kerwin, 1992). Focusing on what we don't know and can learn is both healthy and much more interesting, as knowledge is always evolving and changing. Things we were taught and tested on some 10 to 40 years ago, are now found to be wrong. Remember what you were taught about Columbus, Pangea, Paul Revere and dinosaurs? Think of what has happened in the countries of Africa or on the changing map of the Soviet Union. Increasingly, the world becomes less fixed and more changeable.

The Dynamic Equilibrium

One notion, the dynamic equilibrium, has helped me and those with whom I work to deal with perfectionism. I don't want to sound simplistic about this problem, since there are many psychological and social factors that affect the individual, but this cognitive approach can be useful, especially to a bright mind. In Piaget's (1980) model of The Ever-Widening Spiral of Knowing, a temporary equilibrium or balance may be reached, but never on the same level as before.

Rather, each equilibration (a balancing between assimilation or the process of taking in discordant data to a knowing structure, along with accommodation, the modification of that structure to deal with new elements) moves the system to a higher level of knowing, always implying a new disequilibrium and the requirement for further re-equilibration. As the systems are repeatedly equilibrated, they expand, ever upward and outward, an open and dynamic system leading to a still more perfect equilibrium. This is the paradox — achieving both a more perfect balance and yet having a greater possibility for imbalance and transformation (Cohen, 1995).

Changing Arguments and Developing a Point of View

Like Dweck's (1995) belief systems, if we take this dynamic view of ourselves, then any product represents a temporary plateau in our growth towards a more perfect equilibrium. We might think of this process as the construction

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Dealing with Perfectionism

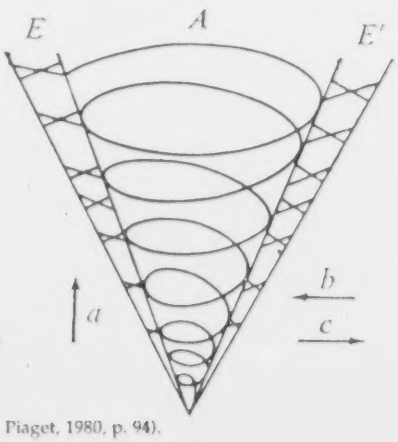
Continued

of a point of view (Gruber, 1981). If we look at the works of any creative thinker over time, what we often find is a changing of arguments. Looking back at our own work, we can feel distressed at how limited it seems. Conversely, we may wonder with disbelief, "Did I really do that 10 years ago? I can't believe I was having those thoughts so long ago. Here I am working on that same problem again!" Actually, the fact that we change or revisit our conceptions is an indication of a creative individual. When we remain static, we cannot be creative, as creativity requires self-transformation.

As an example, take the work of Joe Renzulli, a prolific writer and researcher in the field of gifted education. In 1974, as a consultant to a large urban school district, Renzulli suggested that the best way to identify gifted children was by establishing a percentage quota for each school. This notion then dropped out of his writings. Over five years later, after evaluating many gifted programs, developing the Enrichment Triad Model for curriculum, working on a definition and then a compatible teacher-pupil learning style concept, Renzulli constructed The Revolving Door Model of Identification, a concept far more sophisticated and much more a reflection of his point of view of giftedness. At the same time, the notion of a percentage quota had not been totally abandoned but was incorporated in his concept of talent pool, a percentage of the student population. More recent work (Renzulli & Reis, 1994), looks at principles developed for working with gifted children for enhancing the talents of all, another iteration of his evolving ideas.

Figure 1
PIAGET'S EVER-WIDENING SPIRAL OF KNOWING

E, E'=physical and social envelope A=equilbration



a=maturation b=assimilation c=accommodation

(Adapted from J. Piaget, 1980, p. 94).

It is important to be aware of and consider the changing arguments of a creative mind over time in a productive life. Studying the body of work of any creative person, looking for changing arguments as well as constant motifs, adds a creative dimension. In this way we see the plateaus, the temporary equilibria as well as the evolution in the work, the changes in point of view over time — the functioning totality of a creative life. One characteristic of creative people is courage. These individuals accept their temporary states of equilibrium, put forth their ideas as they currently understand them and allow others to wrestle with their notions. By so doing, counter arguments as well as their own additional thoughts on the subject stimulate greater growth, sometimes involving a change in point of view. Gruber (1981) notes that a system of ideas going through change is always part of a larger system with which it interacts. Sometimes the larger system may inhibit change (as when the ideas are too novel for the time) and sometimes it catalyzes further changes when individuals outside raise questions.

Helping Individuals Deal With Perfectionism

The notion of the temporary equilibrium is useful in helping

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children as well as adults overcome paralyzing perfectionism. It helps us accept the idea that any product of ours is only a reflection of the present moment, a temporary plateau in our development, and not a reflection of ourselves for all time. If we accept the fact that we will change, it becomes less threatening to turn in an assignment, complete a report or share a story with others. I have found five techniques to be helpful in this regard: group discussions, individual counseling, parent counseling, studying an expert's changing arguments (particularly for older students) and a simple "self-talk" statement.

Group Discussions

I have held group discussions about perfectionism and temporary equilibria with gifted individuals from 3rd grade through graduate school. One purpose is to make the classroom a safe place to take risks. If we are to reduce the problem of perfectionism, the individual must feel safe to show a less than perfect side. We first discuss the evidence of perfectionism — "I know some students who play certain games with themselves," I begin. "They get started on a project with great enthusiasm and get almost to the finishing point, but they just can't complete it — because it might not be perfect. You don't have to raise your hands unless you want to, but does this description fit any of you?" (I look around for the little grins of self-recognition. It's as though I've discovered their deepest secret.) "I know other kids who play the time game," I say next. "They put off doing the work until two days before it's due so they can fool themselves with 'I didn't have time to make it as good as I could have.' Is there anyone here who plays the time game?" We go through several other examples such as those suggested in the earlier student anecdotes. I often put up my hand for some of these examples so that the students realize it's not just a young person's problem.

Next I discuss how we are constantly changing. For example, with a group of 5th graders, I might say, "How many of you remember when you were 1st graders and you were learning how to write? Do you write the same or differently now?" Discussion is elicited about how the children's skills have improved. "Do you ever look at stories you wrote way back in 1st grade? What is your reaction?" (Most children feel considerable pride in having made such great progress. Often, they see their early efforts as funny.) I then point out that they had to take those first steps in writing to get to their present level and that they couldn't have expected to write as well then as they do now. From there we move into the notion that we are always changing. "When you get to 10th grade, will you write the same or differently than you do now? What might be different?" Children clearly expect to see improvement in their spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure, etc.

Then I introduce the group to the notion of the temporary equilibrium. We first guess what equilibrium means ("What word do you see in equilibrium that you already know?" and the children quickly come up with equal.) I discuss Piaget, the Swiss psychologist who studied how children think, and his notion of equilibrium (a balance between what you want to learn that doesn't make sense to you now, and how you have to change your structures to deal with these new aspects). I use the example of a rubber band that has a bunch of math ideas in it. To learn decimals, the rubber band had to stretch or change to deal with that new topic. We discuss the idea that each time we deal with something new, it throws our systems into an imbalance and that we have to act to put it back in balance. I ask the group, "Once you learn decimals and your math rubber band has stretched and become balanced, does it go back to the same level as before?" The children quickly see that it always rebalances at a higher level. We then discuss the meaning of temporary. I ask them whether their math rubber band will be stretched again. The answer, of course, is yes. I then tell them that our structures (rubber bands) are dynamic and constantly changing — they are always in temporary states of equilibrium. "Any time you do a project or master something new, your structures balance for a time. You reach a temporary equilibrium. But new questions will always arise throwing you off balance."

We return to the notion of perfectionism. I ask the group if they can see a relationship between our earlier discussion of perfectionism and the notion of temporary equilibrium. Usually the light bulbs go on pretty quickly. I then suggest that when they

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Dealing with Perfectionism

Continued

catch themselves playing perfectionist games, they think about the idea of the dynamic equilibrium — that they are only at a temporary balance which will surely change again. We go through the "I am where I am today" statement (see Self-talk, below), which I post on the bulletin board. Reading the statement together as a chorus a couple of times is a powerful reminder to accept ourselves as we are now. I have found several of these sorts of discussions throughout the year, especially when long-term projects are being worked on, are liberating for some young people.

Individual Counseling

We usually deal with specific perfectionist behavior exhibited by the student. Here I ask the student again to think about his or her past and future development. We might work on small steps to get to an end point. Sometimes a gifted young person takes on a project that is too difficult and needs help finding one that is more his or her "own size." One of my 5th graders had planned to make the entire Jamestown settlement out of milk cartons. After spending the better part of one day on one milk carton house, he came to me completely frustrated. I suggested a project more reasonable in keeping with his abilities and time — that of making a single, detailed colonial house. We often discuss the temporary nature of our balances — and negotiate contracts that support the courage to finish, turn in or share a given product. And I always ask, "What did you learn from the experience?"

Counseling Parents

I find that helping parents deal with their own perfectionistic tendencies through the notion of the temporary equilibrium often helps them ease up on their children and on themselves. We discuss "the great goof of the day" and we laugh at our mistakes. "Guess what I did today?" I might begin. "I wore two different color shoes to work! (accompanied by belly laughs) What goof did you make?" We discuss acknowledging the child's frustrations when a product does not match his or her mental conception of what it should be, especially when the mind moves faster than the young hand. Instead of, "That's a good dog drawing, don't rip it up," say, "I see you're frustrated with your drawing. What do you dislike?" Or, "When you're older, your hand will be able to do more what you want. Meanwhile, how about cutting dog pictures out of a magazine, or would you like to find a book on how to draw dogs?" We also deal with "mirroring" rather than error checking for their children's written work. Have the child read the story to the parent exactly as she or he wrote it and in doing so, the young writer will pick up errors/changes through the oral-aural connection. Then the parent reads it back to the child exactly as written, omitting punctuation if it has been omitted, mispronouncing words if they are misspelled, etc. The child can stop the parent at any point to make changes or corrections. In math, the child talks through the problem to the parent, whose role is to listen, ask for clarification or raise questions, but not to give answers or correct errors.

Studying an Expert's Changing Arguments

Older students might read a particular author's works over time, looking for the changing arguments as well as constant motifs. This could be done for English, science or social studies classes. If 11th graders focus on an interdisciplinary theme of change, this might be a fascinating way of looking at the evolving individual.

Self-talk

A simple self-statement has been very helpful, especially when read together by the class: "I am where I am today. I was different yesterday, I will be different tomorrow. But I am where I am today, and it's OK!"

It is important to recognize that perfectionism has both the negative, inhibiting side and a positive side, seen in task commitment, effort, elegance and grace of a product. To do the best one can is always a goal. Only when we become unable to act and fearful of rejection does it go too far. The notion of the dynamic equilibrium can help individuals of all ages to have the courage to share ideas in a less-than-final form, recognizing that there will always be some aspect that will change later. But this is better than not putting them forth into a larger system outside ourselves, for it is from ideological whipping boys,

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(Piaget, 1981) ideas that we struggle against, that great creativity can develop. Our ideas, however crude or changing, stimulate further growth in others as well as in ourselves. The dynamic equilibrium can further our ability to share our present ways of thinking with others. It also acknowledges that we constantly learn and grow through our struggles to make sense of the world and find balance within ourselves. ❖

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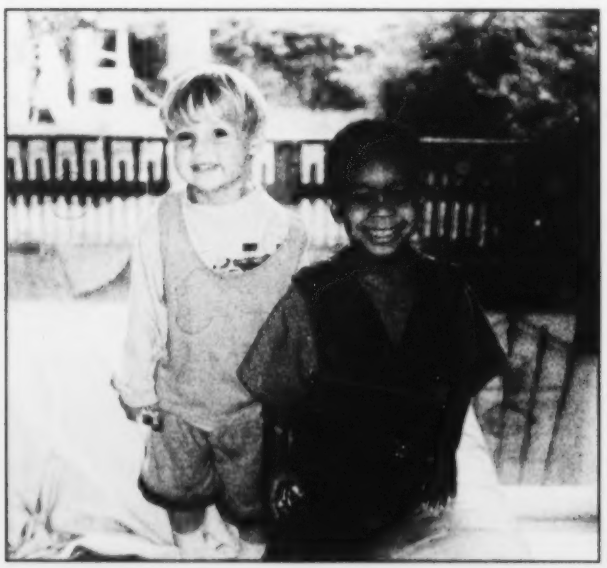

Focus

Perfectionism from the School Years into Adulthood: Continuing Challenges

Sandra K. Howell

***Sandy Howell's** work with gifted children and adults has included classroom teaching, program management, consulting, mediating and being a mom. She has presented workshops and taught graduate classes for more than 20 years.*

The struggles of the child with perfectionism have been the focus of serious scrutiny within the gifted community for a number of years. It was not long after I began to study perfectionism and give workshops for parents, that it became abundantly clear that few attended out of curiosity. These were audiences characterized by intensity. There was always a certain amount of squirming, an indicator that some of the anecdotes I told were hitting too close to home. Predictably, four or five parents would linger afterward to tell of their own continuing struggles with change, calls for flexibility and control of compulsive behavior, while others sought validation for upholding exacting standards.

In the schools, our focus was on building coping skills for students, discussing patterns of perfectionism, preparation for change, livable standards and identifying and implementing helpful strategies from the professional literature. We explored developing a sense of stages of learning and worked out positively stated plans.

Through the years, finding school solutions to gifted students' problems with perfectionism became a matter of negotiation. Parents would do this. School would do that. The immobile student would gradually become able to risk work, the overanxious worker to tolerate first drafts and produce without serious sleep deprivation or emotional distress. The greater problem was that each year and each new teacher called for renegotiating the agreements and accepting that the coping skills of the child were dependent upon those negotiations. In order to make things relatively safe and supportive, we were structuring predictability into the academic environment. Building a sense of safety, control and confidence within the child was not an automatic by-product, as imperfect adults and imperfect environments have always been central to the world view. Feedback would come; things were better or things were still very difficult; situations improved for awhile, then would seem to back slide.

My work as a consultant added insights into the importance of finding ways of coping that are sensitive to the whole family. Later work as a family mediator brought home the importance of stepped agreements. Solutions must keep pace with changes in circumstance and growth toward independence. A 3rd grader needs the predictability of the adult-negotiated environment, while a secondary student needs skills to cope with an unnegotiated environment. A child needs her parents and teachers to lead the way; a young adult must chart and lead his own exploration.

Two Gifted Perfectionists

Lisa, a graduate student in chemistry, is taking a much needed break from her research. She's at a comfortable restaurant with old friends trying to make up her mind between the arranged salad with the raspberry vinaigrette and the creamy risotto with

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steamed fresh vegetables. Everyone else has ordered. She thinks about taste, calories, how long it would be before she'd need to eat again, cost and preparation time. Her friends begin to tease. "Miss Brilliant will get a grant to evaluate the perfect thing to order!" one says. Lisa glances once more at the menu and orders what she always does, the vegetarian lasagna. Maybe she'll come back by herself sometime and try the risotto.

Ben goes on 30 informational interviews before he ever applies for a job, having previously developed a set of questions designed to find out about the various companies. During the interviews, he is assertive and questions the company representatives if their answers reveal patterns that do not match with the way he would structure a process. Eventually, Ben begins to wonder if he should try consulting, reasoning that at least he wouldn't have to put up with idiots everyday.

Students like Lisa find safety in routines that help them predict and control outcomes. They work within the system, follow known paths, work hard and look for ways in which to minimize risks. As a young child, Lisa was both fearful and critical. Her parents recall that at age 8, she refused to leave the house to play unless she knew exactly who was in the cul-de-sac and what they were doing. With coaching from a family therapist, Lisa's parents were able to get her out of the house without first sending a parent on a reconnaissance mission. She learned to look for the familiar and to think about how many times she was able to have fun in this known environment. She was taught to remind herself of what she could do if something happened that made her feel unsafe: she could always go home. As Lisa grew older, she was able to make use of the lessons learned in the cul-de-sac, and her parents learned how to help her become familiar with new situations. It became routine for them to arrange for her to meet her new teachers. They became experts at ferreting out information on expectations, pet projects and new learning. They spent endless hours at her side, teaching new concepts before they were introduced at school and guiding her through projects. The teachers agreed that she was amazing. Such a good girl, so conscientious. Always making sure she knew what to do.

Through the years, finding school solutions to gifted students' problems with perfectionism became a matter of negotiation.

One early traveling experience, with Lisa verbalizing non-stop worries about running out of gas, not being able to find a place to sleep, not being able to see attractions and refusing to leave their hotel room in Montreal because she didn't speak French, made her parents realize that their only hope for family vacations was for Lisa to feel thoroughly familiar with a place before they arrived there. Years after that, after a great deal of consideration during her senior year of high school, Lisa and her parents chose for her a small college with a reputation for stability. It had well-defined requirements and was close enough to home that she could get away if she felt the need. Her parents promised not to change a thing in her room. Lisa, not very excited about chemical research, reasoned that at least a person would know if she were right and the job prospects were said to be good.

The coping skills that paved the way for Lisa, and others like her, to get through school without being in perpetual crisis are a recipe for adult lives of quiet desperation. One story that comes to mind is that of the training of the Indian Elephant. The men who will use the elephants to harvest timber tether each calf to a small stake. Once the animal has accepted the limits of the tether, neither the strength of the tether nor the size of the stake need to be changed. The elephant does not factor in its own growth and added strength even though its days are spent being big and strong. Lisa, too, finds the evidence of her growth and strengths to be nonpersuasive in increasing the size of her world. She would love to taste new dishes, to vary her hair style, to take a class outside her field, but she can't make these everyday

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Continuing Challenges

Continued

choices unimportant enough to make them with any spontaneity. Lisa's coping skills were designed to make her feel safe enough that she could increase the size of her own world. That safe world grew from home to cul-de-sac, to the current year's teacher, to the school and, eventually, to her summer job. Lisa's stock with admiring adults went up. She was always prepared. She knew where she was going.

Now, as an adult, Lisa needs coping skills and inner guidance language that does not hold her hostage. The techniques designed to enlarge her world and give her opportunities to experience herself as a success in childhood no longer work. In fact, they have become agents of regression. Instead of helping her expand, they increasingly bring her back to the default position of the cul-de-sac. Stop and go home. Stop if there is risk. Stop if the situation might be unpredictable. Stop if it might not turn out okay. Stop and return to the familiar.

As an adult, Lisa needs guidance from a person whose life is separate from her own. Because she's been the center and pivotal force in her family configuration, with each threat of upset gaining her total attention from both parents, she has become accustomed to having those closest to her set aside their own needs to meet hers. At enormous social and emotional cost to themselves, her parents cleared new pathways of the unfamiliar and became conditioned to anticipate her fears and smooth the way. Their own desires for spontaneity and exploration were gradually given up because they were afraid to risk Lisa becoming upset. Success became defined by her academic grades and the positive feedback of teachers rather than by growing independence. Now, Lisa needs to be guided toward a definition of success that reaches beyond school. She needs to be coached on new inner guidance dialogue that encourages modest risks and mediates disappointments as being normal, of short duration and of very little importance. The Indian Elephant accepts the tether as a lifelong condition; Lisa must learn that small decisions are not life sentences.

Ben's childhood was very different than Lisa's. He was a product of erratic parenting and a chaotic home life. He learned to keep his fears and dreams to himself and duck when just the sight of him angered his bigger-than-life father. He never knew what triggered tenderness or outbursts of vile temperament, but he tried to figure it all out and longed to please. When school came into his life, Ben discovered a world with simpler patterns. Pay attention, get a smile. Do the work, get a star. Do the work first, get praise. Run fast, get admired. Sing well, get applause. Keep things neat, get a tender touch. All this was available at school. Time passed with Ben finding order at school and increasing disorder at home. The more disorderly home became, the more orderly school needed to be. Unfortunately, school was also becoming imperfect. Highly intelligent and perceptive, Ben was able to see what was wrong and do his best to fix the situations. Convinced they would welcome his corrections, he talked to teachers and the principal when he saw things weren't right. At first he noticed small things. A misspelled word in a book, an error on a handout. As he grew older, his disdain for some of his teachers became obvious; they had a job to do and they weren't doing it properly. He learned to argue over answers to questions in history and literature. He became skilled at using his considerable intelligence to cut down those who didn't meet his standards. His classmates clearly enjoyed his victories but didn't get close. But by the time Ben was a junior he had given up on his small town high school and set his sights on college. In these years, outwardly, he appeared to conform. His grades were perfect, his activities were well-chosen and his teachers decided he had come through his awkward stage and settled into being an exemplary student. He learned to numb out his growing rage and do what was needed.

Ben went to college for one year, then gave up his scholarship and worked minimum wage jobs until he could get into a college with the professor he imagined would become his mentor. This man turned out to be someone whose lectures were dull and who showed no interest in welcoming Ben into his inner circle. He quit at the end of the second term. Ben's third school was really a question of sanity. There was so little stimulation in the town he found himself in when he'd run out of money, that he kept taking

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classes just to have someone to talk with. Since he didn't expect much, anything even remotely intellectual was both a relief from his job and a pleasant diversion. Ben was horrified when he got a notice from the college to come in for a transcript review in anticipation of his senior year; that was not the school he wanted to have to mention as his alma mater. He transferred to a university with an acceptable reputation and returned to the mode of his final years in high school. His intensity and thoroughness of preparation gained attention from a professor with impressive credentials, and he was given opportunities ordinarily reserved for graduate students. Ben began to see himself as either a famous academic or someone who would enter business and gain almost immediate access to the top. But as he immersed himself in the theories of business management he became increasingly restless, finding ideas, phrases, models and examples in the works of others that he recognized as all too familiar to those of his professor. His hero had let his students believe that he was the originator of these ideas and the person with the influential contacts. Ben confronted him and was told that they all borrowed from one another. He decided the man was a fraud and wrote a scathing letter to the chairman of the department, thus killing all chances of a graduate assistantship. He was convinced that he was the only person with integrity and standards. Ben became Lancelot in search of the illusive Grail. He's dropped his university friendships and doesn't answer his phone; once again he supports himself with a job that leaves him too tired to think. Ben does not consider what he's doing to be his real life.

Unlike Lisa, Ben's coping skills were not coached by loving and well-meaning adults. They were invented for self-preservation by a frightened child whose need for security was so great that he required situations and surrogate parents to be perfect. He learned at home to duck if things got out of control and this became his pattern. Be a good boy and you will be accepted and admired by the people in charge. If they aren't perfect, get angry at them for letting you down. If they don't shape up when confronted, duck and get out. If you can't leave, become invisible. With each repetition of the pattern, Ben takes longer to hope again, longer to regain his courage and longer to establish any kind of trusting relationship.

Lisa's coping skills can be modified and expanded to unleash her adult potential; Ben's must be replaced. His world view will perpetuate his outsider status and continuing conflicts, and he will be unable to reconcile his self-concept of independence with his reliance on perfect external conditions. Ben needs the help of a skilled mental health professional, who understands giftedness and perfectionism as well as family systems, in order for him to let go of the frames of reality that he constructed as a bewildered young child.

Help for All

Whether perfectionism is part of a person's nature or is a learned response, it is likely that the habits and patterns of coping, which are a product of childhood, are inadequate for the pace and scope of adult life. Children are properly dependent when many coping skills are first learned; to remain dependent with an external locus of control puts the perfectionistic individual into conflict and under stress. The desire for control must coexist with an inability to control. The pressure to perform and conform are unpredictable and may even seem to be based on whimsy or to be a product of inferior reasoning or ethics. In order for the perfectionist to cope with the onset and continuation of adult life, support is needed to modify and extend the skills learned in childhood. In situations in which the child has had early experience that distorts perceptions of reality, those distortions must be addressed with the aid of a professional whose knowledge and skills include work with giftedness and perfectionism. It is likely that the adult perfectionist will need support most at times of change and crisis when he or she is most vulnerable to regression to immature perceptions, feelings and processes. New skills must lead toward a solid inner locus of control, with adequate room for the perfectionism to be tamed and used to advantage rather than being an unmanageable burden.

With loving and knowledgeable guidance, adult perfectionists can acquire the self-understanding and processes necessary to lead personal and professional lives that allow their gifts to flourish. ❖

The Perfectionist

Monique Lloyd

I heard another piece of paper being balled up and thrown, hard, into the waste paper basket. I recognized the sound. My 2nd grader was doing homework and was frustrated again. This had been going on for several weeks. He would spend as much as two hours every evening doing homework. My happy, easy-going boy didn't seem to exist any longer. He'd do his homework over and over again until it was, in his words, "done right."

This behavior was new, having started at the beginning of the school year. After much advocacy on my part the district had finally agreed to give him an individual IQ test, and he'd been identified as highly intellectually gifted. Consequently, his curriculum had been modified and accelerated. I was beginning to feel twinges of guilt and worry; maybe I had pushed too hard, as some school officials had suggested; maybe he wasn't as smart as I thought, despite what the test scores indicated. Ours is a small rural school district, and I'd discovered few teachers and administrators had had any training in gifted education.

I went into his room. His head was on the desk and there were a few tears; I stroked his hair but didn't say anything. "I have to do this paper over again," he told me in a muffled voice, wiping away tears.

He looked so serious. I looked at what he'd brought home from school. Math. He was in the 5th grade math book, adding and subtracting fractions. He'd done 30 problems. That seemed to be quite a few, especially since they were all identical in difficulty. Towards the end I saw he'd hurried, because his numbers weren't as carefully formed and the last two problems had simple computation errors. Perhaps he'd been tired of doing so many of the same kind of problem, or maybe he'd been running out of time.

"That's not too bad," I told him, giving him a little hug. "You only have to do these two again."

"No, you don't understand," he said. "The teacher said I had to do the whole paper over again. I have to rewrite all the problems so my paper is perfect."

That didn't make any sense. He must have misunderstood.

"Well, I say you only have to do these two," I told him. "I'll write a note to your teacher."

He smiled a small tired and relieved smile, and I was startled to realize I hadn't seen him smile in a long time. In the note I wrote: *My son has told me that you want him to re-do his entire math paper when he only missed the last two questions. I'm sure he must have misunderstood what you said. He has re-done the two missed problems.* The next day the teacher called to tell me she'd received my note and wanted to meet with me. She had another meeting after

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***Monique Lloyd** lives in Oregon with her husband and their four gifted sons. She is the listowner of ORTAG, an e-mail forum for discussion of Oregon TAG-related educational issues, and she is a founder of and serves on the board of the TAG Family Network.*

school, she said, but could meet with me briefly at lunchtime the following day. While I had her on the phone, I asked if I could perhaps come in a bit earlier and help out in the classroom. She hesitated. She had a reputation for discouraging volunteer parents in her classroom. Finally she said firmly, "That might be a good idea. Then you can see what's going on first hand." Before I could ask just what exactly I was going to see first hand, I heard a bell ring and she told me hurriedly that she had to hang up.

When I got to the classroom the next day, the children had just begun working on worksheets. The teacher pulled me aside to whisper, "I've been having problems with your son, and I wanted you to see it for yourself."

At that moment my son's hand went up. "See?" she said, letting out a small sigh. "Why don't you find out what he wants this time?'

"I can't answer this question," he told me in a very quiet voice as I stood beside his desk. The worksheet showed two pictures with instructions to circle which picture depicted a specific emotion. The one he was looking at showed a picture of a boy being chased by someone wearing a mask and another of a boy being chased by a girl. The instructions were to circle the picture showing fear. "I don't know which one to circle. That person is just wearing a mask. That's pretend. It isn't scary. But it would be scary if a girl chased me, especially if she was trying to kiss me."

I tried hard not to smile.

"But which one does the teacher want me to circle? If I don't pick the right one, she'll make me do the whole worksheet over, and I don't want to do that."

Now I was starting to understand.

"Are you telling me that if you make one mistake on an assignment, you have to re-do the entire thing every time?" I asked softly.

"Yes."

"Does everyone have to do that?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "Just me."

I told him in a whisper to circle the picture of the person being chased by the masked individual and added, "I'll talk to your teacher today and we'll straighten this out." Then I went on to help another child whose hand was up.

Our meeting didn't go well. I confirmed that the teacher did indeed expect him to complete all assignments perfectly, and if it wasn't perfect the first time she expected him to re-do the entire assignment until it was. After all, she told me, he was identified as highly intellectually gifted and for her, that meant perfection was to be expected. She also added that she wasn't convinced that he was "truly gifted," however, because he constantly asked her to explain in detail what she wanted him to do. "He can't follow even simple directions," she exclaimed.

I tried to explain to her what was going on but had little success. I left the meeting angry and frustrated. Before I left the building I stopped at the school office and made an appointment with the principal.

I met with the principal and then with the principal and the teacher together over the next few days. The principal told me that the teacher had the right to make those sorts of decisions in her classroom, and the teacher told me she was going to continue doing what she had been doing. I found this intolerable.

The solution we finally agreed upon was to move my son to another classroom. His new teacher didn't expect perfection all the time and didn't ask him to re-do entire assignments if he missed a few problems. Understanding that he didn't need repetitious practice and review, she was also willing to reduce the number of required math problems covering one concept. This woman hadn't had any training in gifted education, but she had a well-deserved reputation for trying to meet the needs of individual children as much as possible. She was also flexible and

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The Perfectionist

Continued

responsive, reading the research studies and books I lent her, as well as willing to try new ideas. As a result, all of those perfectionist qualities I'd seen in my son gradually disappeared over a period of weeks and have never returned.

We still live in the same small, rural district, but in the years since then and now there's been a change in how school officials look at gifted students. That 2nd-grade boy is now a happy, easy-going 12 year old, a 7th grader taking band, art and physical education at grade level and the rest of his classes at the local high school. ❖

Joan Franklin Smutny, *Director of the Center for Gifted at National-Louis University in Illinois, teaches graduate students and is the author of Education of the Gifted, A Thoughtful Overview of Gifted Education and Your Gifted Child.*

Perfectionism and Sense of Self in the Young Gifted Child

Joan Franklin Smutny

A toddler throwing a tantrum when her Lego structure falls apart....A 2nd grader so afraid of timed math tests that he becomes physically ill....A 5 year old hysterical because she received only 4 stars instead of a possible 5.

Some gifted young children have an inflexible sense of order and become easily disturbed over what may seem to be small things to adults. Fragility is pervasive among these sensitive youngsters, who quickly learn to interpret outward symbols and events as indicators of their worth as people. Little people often feel awe for the adult world, perceiving its accomplishments as amazingly perfect. This unrealistic view of perfection and its importance to their own worth causes them to be acutely aware of their own mistakes, condemning themselves harshly for something as simple as a smudged painting.

Teachers and parents can develop a climate of thought at school and at home that encourages self-worth, risk-taking, and freedom to make mistakes. Adults can share their own mistakes with young children, telling stories about their childhood and more serious incidents in adulthood and what was learned from them. Often young children do not believe adults to be capable of error, and when they discover that parents and teachers make mistakes just as they do, they may feel relieved. The goal in working with children who are afraid of failure is to move from the debilitation of self-devaluation to the joy of exploration and creativity for its own sake, emphasizing the completion of projects which will probably not turn out to be perfect.

Parents and teachers who focus more on the joy of discovery than on the significance of grades encourage young gifted children to pursue internal rewards for learning, such as the joy of discovery, invention and original thinking. Children should be encouraged to take risks, knowing that their worth, talents and potential as individuals goes beyond the structure of formal evaluation. When adults consistently embody this approach to learning, children can feel release from the harsh judgments they impose upon themselves for less than perfect work.

Gifted young children will be more open to support when they stop identifying their mistakes as deficiencies— a difficult hurdle for talented young students. Teachers can involve young students in their own evaluations, guiding them in setting attainable goals for themselves. Young children feel more empowered when the grading process is demystified for them. A classroom and home environment that is supportive and secure for each student will encourage creativity and experimentation without fear of rejection. ❖

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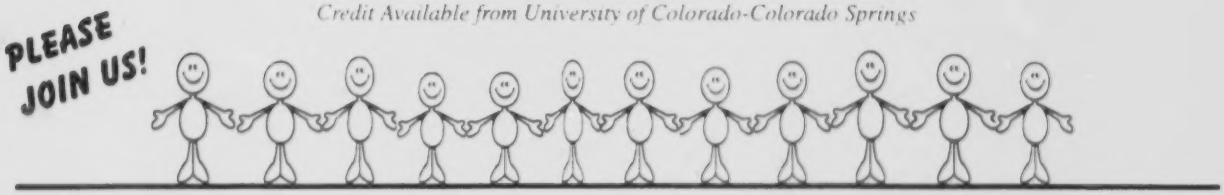


Learning to Learn

Gloria Frender

Note-Taking Strategies

Develop a personal shorthand system:
• Using a 3x5 index card. write down all symbols and abbreviations you currently use while taking notes in all your classes. (Use only the generic ones repeatedly written across all content matter)

Examples: b/c = because, w/ = with, & = and, b/f = before, w/o = without, (= to follow, etc.
• Take this card to every class for one week and add to it when you notice yourself repeatedly writing the same words.
• Practice using your shorthand system when summarizing class notes during home study time.
• Make a special space at the top of your paper to write down important vocabulary words and a key for specialized words to be used for that lecture only (they're not worth adding to your card as you won't need to use them frequently in the future). By writing the abbreviations right on the paper, the key will be there when you need it.

Example:

Vocabulary Key
RC = rock cycle
S = sedimentary
M = metamorphic
I = igneous

• Use these abbreviations in class to save time, then go back and fill in the necessary words if needed during home study time.

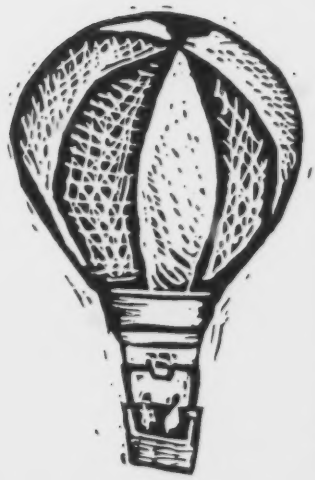
Cornell System:
• Use this system to combine textbook and class note-taking.
• Take notes in the "text notes" column when reading the material assigned by your teacher in preparation for the next class and incorporate the following:
- spacing between major topics
- indenting details under main topics
- bullets to set off individual items
- key words (those italicized or bold print in the text)
- page numbers under key words for quick reference.

• After completing the text assignment, take this same paper into class and take notes in the "class notes" column.
• Use the key words to quickly locate information if the teacher lectures in a different order.
• Listen actively; highlight or underline repeated information but do not rewrite it. If the teacher gives additional information to your text notes, write it in the correct position directly across from that main idea in the "class notes" column.
• This system allows you to listen more and write less, saves time and effort, and efficiently combines text and class notes on one page.
• Use this for quick review and quizzing yourself for tests. Cover all but the "key word" column with a sheet of paper. Look at one key word at a time and recite aloud all the information you can associate with that concept. Slide the paper down to reveal the text and class notes to check your accuracy. ❖

***Gloria Frender**, an Educational Consultant from Colorado, has taught elementary, middle, secondary and post-secondary and is the mother of two gifted children. She is the author of Learning to Learn and Teaching for Learning Success.*

Above & Beyond

Susan Winebrenner



My Child Is a "Paralyzed Perfectionist!" What Should I Do?

A little perfectionism is good for the soul. A certain sense of satisfaction comes when a job on which you have worked hard comes out just about perfect. If you are a rational-thinking adult, you have learned to give yourself permission to get on with your life even if a certain product you have created is not exactly perfect. And that's what separates rational perfectionists from the paralyzed sort....the latter simply cannot rest until there are no actual (or perceived) flaws left. A paralyzed perfectionist is one who fears that he/she is not worthy if not perfect in all endeavors. And that attitude can cause all kinds of grief for the person who holds it and for everyone around her too!

Gifted kids are predictably perfectionistic, due in part to genetics and in part to the conditioning they receive from their well-meaning parents and teachers. One of our favorite expressions with our kids sounds something like, "Grades are not really as important as the fact that you always do your very best." Paralyzed perfectionists perceive this to mean they must do their very best every step of the way: perfectly formed letters, perfectly colored pictures, perfectly neat desk and perfectly created products. As these kids get older, their perfectionism takes on other characteristics....sometimes they don't even start an activity because they are convinced that a perfect outcome is impossible.

To help our kids develop a more realistic attitude about the need to be perfect all the time, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Place more emphasis on the process instead of the product. Ask the youngster to describe the effort expended and to describe what parts might be improved with more effort.
- Help the student learn to set short-term goals and take satisfaction from accomplishing those goals. Paralyzed perfectionists are often thrown by projects that are not due for many weeks. For example, if students have long-term projects, plan backwards from the due date, planning only 30-60 minutes of work per day. Each time short-term goals are reached, youngsters should congratulate themselves on reaching those goals.
- Model how adults often fail to be perfect and how we problem-solve to try again.
- Teach Creative Problem Solving or some other method in which much brainstorming is used. When youngsters see that some of the better ideas or solutions come after many other ideas have been thought up and discarded, they place less pressure on themselves to come up with the best alternative quickly.
- Grades and report cards must be handled carefully. Never focus on one less than perfect grade in an otherwise perfect report. Never display perfect reports where all can see. Don't

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***Susan Winebrenner,** from Illinois, presents workshops on a variety of topics, but her first love is teaching gifted children. She is the author of Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom and Teaching Kids with Learning Disabilities in the Regular Classroom.*

reward grades with money. Don't display bumper stickers that brag about honor roll status. All these well-meaning behaviors from adults send the message, "We love you best when you're perfect." Instead, ask students to describe the process they went through to earn their grades and demonstrate in as many ways as you can that grades other than As are acceptable, especially if they represent the student's true effort. The *last* place we want these kids to be the *first* time they have to decide if they are still valuable after having lost that reputation for perfect grades is in a freshman dormitory.

• Ask librarians and book sellers to help your child locate and read biographies of famous persons who lived through many errors before finding the best alternative. There are also very humorous collections of stories of "blooper" products that turned out to be more valuable than the product that was being sought. (For example, a substance that failed tests for stickiness is now the glue that holds "Post-Its" together.) Live and teach the slogan, "There is no such thing as failure; there is only noticeable evidence that one should try another strategy or move in a different direction."

Place more emphasis on the process instead of the product.

• Encourage youngsters to take lessons in some area in which their natural talents seem limited and to use the process to understand that even high achievers don't have to excel in everything. Too many lessons in areas of "giftedness" exacerbate perfectionism. Encourage noticing kids who are more naturally talented in out-of-school interests and skills. Emphasize the truism that it's okay to be perfectly wonderful in some areas and "perfectly" awful in others. Share personal vignettes about how you have experienced and handled this fact of life.

With caring adults and childhood perfectionists working together toward the goal of achieving balance in life, the challenges of perfectionism are more likely to be addressed. ❖

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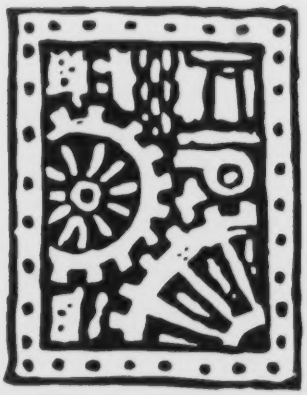
Book Review

Jerry Flack

E. Paul Torrance: "The Creativity Man," An Authorized Biography
by Garnet W. Millar. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1995.

Try this word association test. Mention the term *creativity* and any person remotely familiar with the education of gifted, talented and creative children is likely to respond: *Torrance*. In this field, E. Paul Torrance stands proudly, an equal alongside other giants such as Lewis Terman and Leta Hollingworth. Indeed, more than any other person, Dr. Torrance must be credited with changing both the popular and professional perceptions of giftedness in children. Beginning in the 1950s, he persuaded educators to move away from an I.Q. score as the sole instrument utilized in the identification of gifted students. His belief that creativity must be considered in any equation for identifying gifted students has received wide acceptance, and his definitive work, the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT), has been widely adopted as an identification instrument. His Future Problem Solving Program, created with his late wife Pansy, represents yet another stellar contribution to gifted child education.

The strength of this authorized biography is its overall presentation of a remarkable man who has spent a lifetime helping others. Millar's structure is chronological, beginning with Torrance's Southern agrarian roots and childhood passages, and ends with the octogenarian's reflections on his retirement years and his life as a whole. Wisely, the author allows the subject to tell much of his life story in his own words, and in this way readers learn of Torrance's sometimes painful development and youthful awkwardness. They come to know a man plagued by learning disabilities and self-perceived shortcomings. That Paul Torrance never learned to plow a straight furrow as a farm boy or drive a car as an adult are facts that pale beside his lifetime achievements. Millar portrays Torrance as a great man who unleashed his amazing creativity and blazed new pathways in the educational history of the nation, first at the University of Minnesota and later in his beloved native state of Georgia. The knowledge that he remains concerned about such matters to this day makes the man all the more interesting and appealing as a human being.



Millar has collected tributes and reminiscences from colleagues, friends and students who have known and been touched by the "Creativity Man," and this collection makes a beautiful and splendid bouquet. The book's pages overflow with testaments of love and appreciation returned to a man who has given so much to others. The portrait that emerges is one of a remarkably humble man who has never abused his eminence nor sought fame or fortune at the expense of others. Indeed, Millar shows a man who has given generously of his time, praise and worldly goods to further the careers and learning of others, pouring all

- continued on next page

Jerry Flack, *President's Teaching Scholar and Professor of Gifted Education at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is the author of Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors and Lives of Promise.*

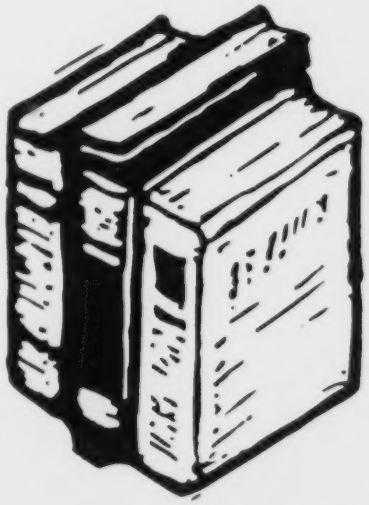
his lifetime professional royalties and honoraria fees back into research and personally financing the study of many graduate students. Tellingly, he also directed the most dissertations (110) in the history of the School of Education at the University of Georgia, as well as directed the most dissertations on the disadvantaged in the United States.

Other strong points in Millar's book include a narrative style which is highly readable and not overburdened with educational jargon. Both period and contemporary photographs greatly enhance the reading experience and contribute to the authenticity of the work. Appendices list Dr. Torrance's publication history and outline significant events in his life, and a substantial name index is provided.

The biography is not without flaws, however. Organizationally, lack of a subject index makes content searches difficult; for example, tracking the development and evolution of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking across several decades and several chapters is not easy. Nor can one quickly locate information about the founding of the Torrance Center at the University of Georgia. There are factual errors as well. Millar states that the Korean War ended in 1957, when in fact the final armistice was signed in 1953. In portraying events of the year 1966, when Dr. Torrance returned to Georgia, the biographer states that "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" won the Academy Award for Best Picture. "A Man for All Seasons" defeated "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" for the Best Picture Oscar in 1966. Also, Millar places Colorado State University in Greeley, when in reality that school is located in Fort Collins.

A more serious flaw is Millar's persistent theme that Dr. Torrance's career has been plagued by the professional jealousy of others, and his preoccupation with the issue almost sinks the book. That the subject has experienced professional jealousy is not questioned. No eminent person lives without skeptics, even enemies, and no doubt Torrance has had his share of critics. However, the very stature the man has achieved and the gargantuan body of published scholarship (more than 1,000 publications) testifies to the fact that professional and lay populations alike take his work very seriously. Indeed, just one artifact of his scholarship, the TTCT, has been translated into 34 different languages and is used in 50 nations around the world. Almost any reader will recognize that E. Paul Torrance is one of the most respected names in the pantheon of creativity heroes and holds a similar place in the hall of fame of gifted education leaders. Hence, it is difficult to take very seriously the perception that professional jealousy has been an insurmountable hindrance to his career.

Overall, though, the impression of this work is positive. It seems that one thing lacking in the field of gifted education is a strong sense of history. Who are Lewis Terman, Leta Hollingworth and E. Paul Torrance, and what circumstances propelled them toward focusing their life energies upon gifted children and creativity? With this book, Millar helps fill that void in a big way. *E. Paul Torrance: The Creativity Man, An Authorized Biography* is a treasure trove for scholars who desire knowledge of how Dr. Torrance became involved in the study of creativity, how he developed creativity tests, and how he and his beloved life companion Pansy created the Future Problem Solving Program. This biography chronicles the life of a distinguished scholar and an uncommonly good man, while also functioning as a scrapbook of poems, reflections, letters of appreciation, artifacts and other tributes to an extraordinarily caring and self-sacrificing individual. It is a Valentine to the man who is nothing less than the education world's Father of Creativity. ❖



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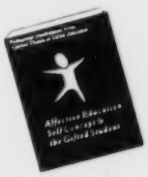

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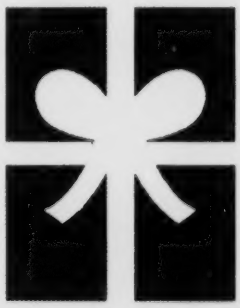
Virtual Shopping on the Internet

Sandra Berger

No time to shop for the holidays? Need a last minute gift? Looking for ideas? Try the Internet, the world's largest shopping mall. On the Internet, you can shop long after the local stores have closed. If you are nervous about providing your credit card number by e-mail, select the stores that have security built into their servers. (If their servers are secure, they will tell you.) Or, find great ideas and products, and contact the business by FAX or phone. Here are some URLs for some of the largest Internet shopping malls. This list is not intended to be comprehensive. Some of the sites require graphical browsers; others are text-based.

Hint: If the Internet shopping malls seem overwhelming and you know exactly what you are looking for, try one of the big search engines like Yahoo URL: http://www.yahoo.com. Yahoo is probably the largest and easiest-to-use categorized list of Web resources.



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Focus: Gifted Education & the Law

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Between the Lines

Back a couple of decades, in the infancy of what we now call gifted education, I began my advocacy efforts with a presentation to a local PTA group. As a mom who had already encountered resistance to requests for challenging my unusually talented youngster, I looked forward to the opportunity to express my views in public.

When I discovered that the other speaker on the program was a dad with six special education children, all at the lower end of the continuum for developmental disabilities, I became uneasy. Legislation and funding for special ed had only recently become reality, set in motion primarily because of advocacy efforts of parents of children with critical and specialized needs. And here I was, about to tell about my verbal young son, reading at such a young age and wanting to absorb so much information about so many subjects that the school could not adequately meet his needs; I was advocating for school programs and legislative funding for gifted and talented students.

I listened to this father's tales of his children and the joy he experienced when his 10-year-old, thanks to a federally funded program, learned to tie her shoes. I joined the audience in wiping away tears, and my heart sank as I realized that what I was asking for could never evoke a similar level of empathy.

At that point something amazing happened. Amid the applause for the man who'd just spoken so movingly and the noise (at least to my ears) of my own knees knocking, that father stepped to my side and whispered, "Go for it! Your children's needs are just as important as mine."

Well, heartened by his compassion and generosity, I stood up that day and pleaded for enrichment and expansion of curriculum for bright students. It took a long time of many more meetings, presentations and an increasing number of active advocacy voices, and although my own children grew up and out of school in the meantime, the programs *were* put in place. Countless gifted children eventually benefited from state and federal funding.

Unfortunately, legislation in support of and accompanying public funding for gifted education has never been consistent enough or adequate to provide for all the unique and varying needs of our most advanced children. Mindful of this unstable support, *Understanding Our Gifted* presents essential information in this issue on "Gifted Education and the Law" with Frances Karnes, Ron Marquardt and Debra Troxclair sharing their expertise in that area, Carol McCarthy describing the increase of states-supported dual enrollment in high school and college, along with the real-life experience of Oregon parent Monique Lloyd.

Always mindful of alternative efforts in educating gifted children, *Understanding Our Gifted* begins a multi-part series on homeschooling. Deborah Haydock introduces us to her young son while sharing her family's homeschooling decision-making process. Also in this vein, Sandra Berger supplies a wealth of online information to aid and support those families who choose to educate their children at home.

We welcome writer Cal Roberts to our editorial staff. D.K. ❖

Focus

The Evolving Legal Framework in Gifted Education

Frances A. Karnes
Ronald G. Marquardt
Debra A. Troxclair

Because gifted children do not enjoy the same level of federal statutory protection as the disabled, it has taken time for a patchwork of state legal proceedings to evolve to assist the gifted (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991a). Slowly, but surely, identifiable state legal procedures are being established to resolve disputes involving gifted students. These run the gamut from informal procedures to the formal method of instituting litigation (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991b).

The least complex dimension of the legal infrastructure is the path parents need to take prior to becoming involved in mediation, due process or court cases (Karnes and Marquardt, 1993). Even at this level of conflict resolution, however, parents need to know the legal rights applicable to their gifted children. This information can be found in your state's rules and regulations and laws. Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt (in press) suggest that parents should keep informed of the legal rights for gifted children from reliable sources, not from hearsay. Current state rules and regulations, laws, and local and county board policies and procedures may be obtained from your state department of education, your state senator or representative, the state association of the gifted in your area or your local board of education.

Proceeding through appropriate channels will most often result in conflict resolution. First, parents should discuss any difficulties with the classroom teacher if the problem relates to classroom matters. Send a letter asking for confirmation in writing as to what happened during the meeting. If the outcome is not in your favor, that documentation will prove to be valuable as you take the problematic issue up to the next level for resolution. Continue upward on the chain of command from principal to superintendent to school board, etc., until resolution is achieved. Remember to get written documentation of your efforts each step of the way. Regardless of how much of the legal infrastructure of gifted education you must use, having appropriate up-to-date documents, accurate documentation of prior events and going through the proper channels will provide assurance that you, as parents, are doing all you can to assure appropriate education for your gifted child.

Parents who sue for relief often run into difficulty. Lawsuits against a local school district, particularly in a small locality, often result in community disapproval. It can deteriorate quickly into an "us vs. them" mentality with persons wondering why someone is attacking an institution of community pride, the school system.

Lawsuits are expensive. Frequently, parents won't know the expense involved in filing one, as these matters are often hard to predict at the front end of litigation. How much of a legal foundation exists in the state, i.e., statutes, rules and regulations and past court decisions, may well determine how much legal labor will be involved. The reluctance of the school district in agreeing to provide relief, where relief is warranted, affects legal costs. School districts often fight hard to win a legal battle so that an unfavorable precedent will not be established that could be used against them in future cases.

When there is a lack of legal foundation for bringing a case, and in some

- continued on next page

Frances A. Karnes *is a Professor of Special Education and Director of the Center for Gifted Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi. She and Ron Marquardt are Co-Directors of the Institute for Law and Gifted Education.*

Ronald G. Marquardt *is a Professor and Chairman of the Department of Political Science at the University of Southern Mississippi. He is a specialist in constitutional law and legal research.*

Debra A. Troxclair *is a teacher of the gifted in Slidell, Louisiana and a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississipi.. She is the mother of a 15-year-old gifted and artistically talented son.*

Legal Framework
Continued

cases even when existing state law supports the lawsuit, judges frequently defer to the expertise of the educational experts. Many judges, trained as generalists, are unwilling to second-guess the policy imposed by education professionals unless the school district's stance is particularly unwise or unfair. Therefore, parents oftentimes have a tough burden to overcome in court.

Despite the above considerations, there have been notable court victories in gifted education. The 1988 Pennsylvania Supreme Court case, *Centennial v. Board of Education*, held that gifted education in the state meant individualized instruction for gifted students in addition to grouping students in a resource class (Karnes and Marquardt, 1988; Marquardt and Karnes 1989). A certified gifted education teacher who had been passed over by a school board in the hiring process in favor of a non-certified teacher won a court victory in *Johnson v. Cassell*, a West Virginia case (Karnes and Marquardt, 1995). A father who sought early admission for his child who had been tested and found to be "emotionally, physically, and intellectually" ready for the 1st grade won a court order admitting his daughter to 1st grade (*Doe v. Petal Municipal Separate School District*). This triumph came despite a no-exceptions state statute basing admission on chronological age (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991a; 1991b).

While it is often difficult to locate gifted education case law since states usually publish only appellate, not trial court decisions, case law continues to become an important component of the evolving structure. These decisions should be closely monitored by all interested in gifted education.

Mediation and due process are relatively new ways of solving disputes, particularly in regard to issues related to preschool, elementary and secondary gifted students (Karnes and Marquardt, 1993). Both processes are usually established by state law through the legislature, state board of education enactment or state department of education rules and regulations. In the case of mediation, only about 12 states allow mediation for the gifted, and over half of the states have some provision for due process for the gifted (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991a; Coleman, Gallagher, and Foster, 1994).

The time frame for each is different. In most circumstances, a mediation meeting can be set within days and at the convenience of both parties after a request has been made. However, it cannot interfere with the due process timeline which must be completed in most states within 45 days unless the hearing officer agrees to an extension or the state regulations require a different time period.

Mediation is an informal process conducted by a facilitator who focuses on areas of agreement and compromise. The person is not a judge or jury and should not impose his/her will, values and/or decisions. Although not required in all states having mediation and due process, the person conducting such should have received training in his/her responsibilities, state law and rules and regulations governing gifted education, as well as any local or county provisions for them. In most states, mediators and due process hearing officers are not certified. West Virginia has excellent requirements for due process hearing officers in gifted education (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991a).

For mediation, parents and the school district representative(s) must come prepared to discuss the situation with accurate information and to come to an agreement on what is the best solution to the problem. After hearing each party's perceptions and knowledge of the dispute, the mediator meets separately with a representative of the school district and the parents. The mediator listens for points that both sides share in common and assists with the formulation and writing of a mediation agreement, which is a document in which both parties contribute and agree to follow. Mediation agreements must be written with specificity, noting what is to be accomplished, by whom and in what time frame (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991a).

In contrast, the role of the due process hearing officer is one of an impartial decision maker rendering a written decision. When a parent or a district requests a due process hearing, it becomes mandatory to conduct one. The hearing is quasi-formal, confidential and the parents make a decision as to the presence or absence of the child. Both parties may have an attorney present along with other persons to give and support the evidence. After the evidence is given, the hearing officer has a limited amount of time, usually 30 days, in which to write the decision. It is sent by mail to both parties and is legally

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binding unless appealed to the next highest level, which is usually a state agency and/or a civil court.

The costs of both informal processes would be difficult to calculate. However, most mediation sessions take one day, in contrast to the many, because of the amount of evidence given, in a due process hearing.

The Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, is an avenue to pursue for parents of protected classes of gifted students (disabled, gender, race, and national origin) (Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt, in press). An overview of the current knowledge of protected classes of gifted students and the Office for Civil Rights is presented elsewhere in this issue.

Parents interested in following this evolving legal framework should join and become involved in their state associations. Many state associations have a legal issues committee, and 21 states are currently involved in the Legal Issues Network. Located at the University of Southern Mississippi, this growing network serves as a vehicle for sharing information concerning legal issues. For more information your state organization may contact Dr. Frances A. Karnes, University of Southern Mississippi, Box 8207, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-8207. ❖

Civil Rights for Gifted

The Emerging Role of the Office for Civil Rights

Debra A. Troxclair

Legal issues in the field of gifted education have emerged as an area of interest during the last decade, with its visibility being recorded by Karnes and Marquardt (1991). The different components of these issues include court cases (Karnes and Marquardt, 1988; 1989; 1995), due process (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991) and proceedings emanating from the Office for Civil Rights (Karnes and Marquardt, 1991b, 1993).

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), located in the Department of Education, plays an important role in the currently evolving gifted education legal framework. The OCR assures that non-discriminatory policies are instituted and enforced by monitoring school districts' compliance with numerous federal regulations. The OCR additionally functions in negotiating resolutions to conflicts between parents and school districts when differences occur resulting from presumed discrimination with regard to race, color, national origin, gender, disability or age (Marquardt and Karnes, 1994; Karnes, Troxclair, and Marquardt, in press). This article will trace the record of the Office of Civil Rights and its role in the field of gifted education.

The involvement of the OCR in this role greatly simplifies the conflict resolution process for parents and school districts. Court cases are expensive, inefficient and time-consuming (Marquardt and Karnes, 1994). Another advantage of OCR hearings is that the parties involved function as problem-solvers rather than adversaries. All participants are mutually seeking compliance with federal regulations, with the threat of loss of federal dollars acting as a definite incentive for school districts to sincerely seek solutions to discriminatory practices (Marquardt and Karnes, 1994). A written letter of finding, another result of an OCR hearing, is a document containing important information of interest to those concerned with the legal issues in gifted education. According to

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Civil Rights

Continued

Marquardt and Karnes (1994), the letters contain the findings of the investigation, a statement informing readers if the district was in compliance and/or the steps that were necessary to meet compliance and documents monitoring activities if required.

The emerging role of the Office for Civil Rights in gifted education has been reported by Marquardt and Karnes (1994) and Karnes, Troxclair, and Marquardt (in press). Marquardt and Karnes (1991) examined the amount and content of OCR proceedings pertinent to gifted education from 1985-1991. In that study 48 letters of findings were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

Marquardt and Karnes (1994) categorized those results geographically, by protected class and issue and by the outcome of the complaint procedure. Eight out of ten regional offices produced letters of findings for analysis. 34 of the 48 complaints originated in southern states and involved issues affecting African Americans. Additional complaints involving race and ethnicity included the following protected groups: Native Americans, Hispanics, East Indian and one reverse discrimination case involving a Caucasian. Admission to gifted programs was the most common complaint, and other issues included screening for admission to gifted programs, staff assignments in gifted programs, the alteration of an Individualized Education Plan for a gifted student, relocation of a fine arts program and, in two instances, insufficient record keeping at the district level made it hard to determine if that district was in compliance or not. For the most part, school districts were found to be in compliance (34 out of 48 times). When found not to be in compliance OCR helped negotiate, implement and monitor non-discriminatory practices.

Marquardt and Karnes (1994) concluded from their 1985-1991 analysis that the OCR is indeed an effective method to be used in solving conflicts involving discriminatory practices in gifted education without the expense of formal litigation and that the letters of findings assist in clarifying issues and help identify the corrective action, if any is necessary.

To continue tracking the efforts of the OCR in gifted education, Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt (in press) surveyed its regional offices in order to update the previous Karnes and Marquardt study (1992 through August of 1995). Thirty-eight new letters of findings were received as a result of a request for information from the OCR in Washington, D. C. During this time period nine of the ten regional offices produced letters of findings, with almost half of those coming from Region VI which includes the states Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. As in the previous study, the letters were categorized into geographic regions, protected class and issue, and the outcome of the complaint procedure. Complaints involving these protected groups surfaced: Limited English Proficiency, Disabled, African Americans, Hispanics, Hispanics/African Americans, Latinos/African Americans, Minorities and National Origin Minorities. Once again the majority of complaints (17 out of 38) involved African Americans.

The issues of concern in these letters of finding fell into four general categories: admission to gifted programs, identification of gifted students, placement in gifted programs and procedures involving notification/testing/communication for gifted students. School districts were found to be in compliance in 16 out of the 38 complaints in the more recent study.

The two studies revealed interesting similarities and differences. In both studies the majority of the activity occurred in the South, specifically in Region VI. While this southern region still had the most activity, Arkansas replaced Texas as the state having the most complaints. In both studies minority access to gifted programs was a recurrent issue, but differences between the two were also discovered. There was an increase in the percentage of complaints dealing with disabled individuals for the time period 1992 - August, 1995.

The second study revealed other interesting information with regard to depth and breadth of these issues. With respect to depth of the issues, 80% as many letters were reported in only half the number of years. Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt (in press) conclude that OCR has either been more active in analyzing gifted programs, or OCR has developed a better system of recording and reporting them. With respect to breadth, Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt (in press) reported on a range of issues for the time period 1992 - August, 1995; from making gifted education information available to a blind parent of a gifted child to examining testing

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procedures for prospective gifted students.

Karnes, Troxclair and Marquardt (in press) conclude that OCR is proving to be a viable strategy for conflict resolution in gifted education as it provides a less costly and efficient administrative remedy rather than an adversarial litigious one. A further assertion is that the results of the efforts of the OCR need to be more widely disseminated to parents, school officials, state associations for the gifted, university personnel and others interested in the emerging body of information pertinent to the evolving framework of legal issues in gifted education. ❖

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Focus

Content Acceleration for High School Students: States-Supported Legislation

Carol R. McCarthy

Bright students have discovered new allies in their state legislatures. Legislators, eager to jump-start K-12 reforms through the force of law, became enamored with an idea that educators and parents view as content acceleration. The politicians saw it differently. They presumed that laws creating "school choice" would prod some desired educational reforms; among their more radical ideas about choice, one relatively obscure option surfaced as a less volatile, more acceptable favorite. In 1985, Minnesota's legislators devised a legal package that met that state's requirements for choice and increased curricular standards, all accomplished without additional tax dollars. This mechanism became known as post-secondary options (PSO), or dual enrollment; now it's the law in 19 states.

For bright students, PSO means that all students who meet their state's qualifications — usually 11th and 12th graders — must be permitted the choice of enrolling simultaneously in high school and college courses. The law varies from state to state, but in general, students officially retain their high school status while enrolling in college courses on a part- to full-time basis. The college courses can earn either, or both, high school and college credit. In addition, most of the states dictate that tax dollars allocated to the K-12 school district must be used to pay a portion, and often all, of the costs of college tuition. During the last two years of high school, a motivated student can enroll in appropriately challenging classes, experience a gradual transition of school-to-college life and build a college transcript that reflects sophomore standing upon high school graduation.

Motivated by different forces, legislators and gifted advocates found common ground in this legislation. Both groups agreed that all students — including those identified as gifted — should be appropriately challenged when they go to school and that a variety of options should be available to provide that challenge. Legislators found the idea appealing when it was accomplished with no new tax dollars. Supporters of gifted students found it appealing because it matches students with optimally challenging courses.

Underlying Philosophy Supports Needs of Accelerated Students

The greatest power of postsecondary options arises through its tacit approval of three concepts that have long been advocated, but too seldom achieved, in gifted education. The underlying philosophy of postsecondary options:

1) removes — in most states — a previous inequity that predicated early access to college courses on a family's ability to pay. Prior to this legislation, few bright high school students could gain access to college course enrollment. When they did, the decision was often influenced by the advocacy, and affluence, of their parents. Now, all who qualify have access to college courses, regardless of the family's ability to pay.

2) supports — in all states — a student's right to access, and study, curriculum above the student's grade level. Suddenly, without mention by name, state law makes content acceleration — access to sequential curriculum with no upper limits — an acceptable practice.

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3) dictates — in many states — that general education fund monies are correctly appropriated to pay for content acceleration. Rather than special or "gifted" monies funding this option, the state's educational dollars, allocated on a per student basis, can now be used to purchase the appropriately challenging curriculum and instruction needed by that student.

Legislators found acceptable what often has been difficult to achieve in practice: that sequential content acceleration is an appropriate educational option, even when offered beyond the confines of a district. Moreover, tax dollars allocated for each student's education can be used to pay for it.

Common Elements of Post-Secondary Options

PSO language, now legislated in 19 states, has common elements. However, depending on how the legislation is written, subtle differences in wording can result in blatantly different outcomes. Moreover, legislation rarely provides precise definitions or interpretations, and thus local districts often become the final arbiter in implementing the law. In some states, the legislation grants powers to state boards and state departments of education for hearing appeals, interpreting legislative intent and determining educational policy and practice.

Across the states, the law differs. In 11 states (Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin), comprehensive programming offers dual enrollment at minimal or no cost to students, and credit applies to both high school and college; few college courses are restricted. One state (Iowa) provides dual enrollment at minimal or no cost, but credit applies toward high school graduation only. In five states (Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana) students pay tuition costs, and restrictions limiting academic credit and eligible courses are identified. Two states (Nevada, Oklahoma) recently implemented programs and few details are available. (ECS, 1996).

The intent of the legislation in most states is to increase challenging options, or choices, for students. Beyond that good intention, schools, students and families need to understand the issues and comply with several requirements to make post-secondary options work. Pertinent variables in the legislation include:

• Student Qualification

Most states identify that students must be in 11th or 12th grade. A few states require demonstration of additional competencies.

Potential Issues: What defines a student as an 11th or 12th grader? Schools usually measure 11th grade status either by previous years spent in high school or number of high school credits earned. Can a student qualify as an 11th grader simply by completing two years of high school? Two years in attendance does not guarantee that a student has taken enough classes and earned enough credits to gain 11th-grade status. Other students can earn sufficient high school credits to qualify as an 11th grader before completing two years of high school. Accelerated summer programs, high school enrollment during middle school and testing-out options all provide students early access to demonstrating mastery of high school curriculum. Is credit awarded for this learning, and does it count toward the credit criteria for 11th graders? Usually, local districts determine through policy what defines a student's high school grade. In any given state, therefore, a student could qualify by meeting different criteria as set by different local districts. When a district has no written policy, this could be an area for negotiation.

A few states stipulate additional criteria. In Michigan, for example, students must also pass the

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state's high school proficiency tests in the three areas tested: math, science and language (reading and writing). This produces important issues in timing. Proficiency tests are administered in the spring of the 11th-grade year, and results become available in the fall of 12th grade. Thus, districts must develop new procedures to insure that 10th graders planning to dual enroll in 11th grade can take the proficiency tests a year early. The law does stipulate that 10th graders can test early, as long as parents make a written request. Schools and families must know details of the law and be alert lest missed deadlines render students ineligible.

• Qualifying College Courses:

College courses are used to meet and replace the student's high school course requirements and extend curricular options. Some states place no restrictions on which college courses can qualify for dual enrollment; others write language to tightly control what courses qualify. In general, states permit students to enroll in a college course when "the course is not offered" by the high school. Whether by explicit or implicit statement, students are expected to enroll in courses that emphasize academic content. Some states exclude college courses that are "activity" courses and those with a religion-based curriculum.

Potential Issues: Restricting the types of college courses that students can take is motivated by educational philosophy, and also by economics. Philosophically, students are offered dual enrollment to gain access to more challenging curriculum not available in high school courses. The economics matter to schools: the fewer courses students take outside the district, the less money leaves the district for college fees.

Central to the issue about what college courses qualify is the politics about who gets the money. Previously, districts collected K-12 monies based simply on student enrollment; now students can take the money with them when they enroll in another institution.

Thus, the determination of when a high school "offers a course" requiring the student's enrollment takes on additional significance. Is the same course name, French I, sufficient evidence of a high school duplicating a college course? Should curriculum and course objectives be compared? Wisconsin attempts to set criteria for curriculum overlap, but most states are silent on the issue, thus placing the decision on course duplication with the local district.

Is it sufficient that a district simply offer the course, or does the student need to be able to enroll in the course? Occasionally, a conflict in a student's high school schedule could deny a student access to the school's course. Wisconsin and Michigan identify that a student's scheduling conflict permits the student to enroll in a college course; Michigan stipulates that the local school board determines when a student's scheduling conflict is genuine.

Finally, what should happen when a backlash of the law's intent occurs? Minnesota describes experiences with students choosing to enroll in a local college course rather than the district's very rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) course. AP, and the International Baccalaureate (IB), are two programs that replicate college curriculum within the high school setting. Should a district that offers genuine, college level equivalent classes and external examinations be required to pay the college tuition bill because the student opted for an "easier" credit? AP and IB programs are the true "courses offered by the district" that duplicate college courses. Perhaps the best measure of duplicated coursework is the ability of the student to earn college credit. Both AP and IB provide that option. AP, IB and dual enrollment are all needed as options for bright students. If the value of all of them is not protected, the programs could develop an unhealthy competitiveness. The fledgling legislation, dual enrollment, might not survive the lobbying of well established, big business.

• Eligible Colleges/Universities

In most states, all public, private and independent colleges and universities usually qualify to participate in postsecondary options. This includes both two- and four-year college/university programs.

Potential Issues: Some states may exclude private colleges and universities from this process when the state's constitution, or political decision, prevents public tax dollars from funding private education. The separation of public dollars and private education is limited to K-12

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education. Some states have already determined that public school monies can pay tuition costs to private higher education institutions. This is permitted because the student is enrolled in college-level curriculum, not K-12 curriculum.

Two year community colleges are marketing their services to postsecondary students. School districts may recommend community college enrollment for monetary reasons. Districts would be billed less for tuition costs at a two year institution.

Students usually choose to enroll at the college/university nearest their home. When they have a choice of several institutions, they should compare the transferability of credits earned from different institutions and find classrooms, academic environments and faculty and students with whom they are compatible.

• Earning High School and College Credit

Most states stipulate whether the student will earn high school or college credit by taking the college course. Some states allow the student to earn both high school and college credit. Others permit the college course to count only for high school credit and agree that if the student later enrolls at that college, college credit will be awarded for the course work previously completed.

Most states permit students to determine how to combine high school and college courses to produce a workable class schedule. Some states permit full-time college enrollment (student enrolls at the high school but takes no classes there). Other states limit college enrollment to two college courses per semester.

Potential Issues: In some states, choosing the type of credit is tied to the payment of tuition; schools pay for earning high school, but not college, credit. Earning only college credit may make it difficult to accrue sufficient high school credits needed to meet graduation requirements. Earning only high school credit could leave a student's record devoid of successful college work.

Most states' legislation is silent on two important variables. 1) How should the amount of credit be equated between high school and college classes? How much high school credit is awarded for a 5 credit, or a 2 credit, semester or quarter hour, college course? What credit is earned if the college course has no counterpart in the high school curriculum? In Colorado and Indiana, the Department of Education devised a formula for equating college to high school credit. In Colorado, students can appeal a district's decision about credit to the state board of education. 2) How are the grades earned in a college course translated, if at all, to a high school record? Are these grades calculated as a part of the student's high school GPA? In practice, local districts decide.

• Notification to Students:

Most states require districts to notify students about postsecondary options in the early spring of the year prior to dual enrollment.

Potential Issues: Some states stipulate how the notification must occur; commonly, districts are required to notify families by letter. Most often, districts mail a letter to the student's home, although some districts have met the letter of the law through a notice in the school newsletter. One district met the notification requirement through a want ad in the personal column of the town's newspaper. Missing deadlines can cause a year's delay. Many colleges enroll students in the spring prior to fall classes. To take full advantage of this option, planning should start during middle school.

Developing Content Acceleration during Grades 6-12

To make the most of post secondary options during high school, planning ideally starts during the middle school years. Content acceleration can't wait until high school. Eleventh grade students are best ready for college curriculum (grade 13) if they start selected high school courses before 9th grade. When the Talent Search model, offered through various regional university programs around the country, is utilized during middle school, content acceleration can start in grade 7 or 8. The Talent Search process provides off-level testing to assess student's academic

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Content Acceleration

Continued

abilities and recommends content acceleration, matched to the individual student's need, that begins during middle school (Olszewski-Kubilius, 1994).

The ideal counseling model would utilize existing programs to build accelerated course options. Counseling would help the student to initiate the talent search during middle school, enroll in selected high school courses during middle school, utilize AP and IB programs available within the high school and move to dual enrollment as high school curriculum is mastered prior to high school graduation.

Using K-12 Monies for Post-Secondary Options

The majority of states provide payment for the student's basic costs of college enrollment. This usually includes tuition and mandatory course fees, materials fees and any registration fees required by the college. Some states pay for textbooks; few provide for transportation and only on a basis of demonstrated need.

Post-secondary options cause most districts to focus on the revenues they will lose when they pay a student's college tuition. This legislation does shift the philosophy on expending educational dollars: it supports offering high (optimal) academic challenges for all students and pays for that experience wherever it occurs. In most states, the district still collects the full-time allotment for each student enrolling in the district. Monies are then paid, on a pro-rated basis, to the educational institution that supplies that optimal challenge. Those pro-rated dollars go to the college only when the college, and therefore not the district, is responsible for the student's instruction in a course. Minnesota's initial experience showed that many districts wanted to retain students and quadrupled the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses they offered in just three years after dual enrollment was implemented (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Over time, however, in some communities those rigorous AP courses have suffered from low enrollment.

Post-secondary options makes a district's budgeting process less secure. The guarantee that districts will retain all the dollars allocated through simple enrollment of students is gone. Some states allocate only the state's portion of tax dollars to be pro-rated for post-secondary options, thereby retaining local tax revenues within the school whether or not the student takes any classes there. In most states, a district does retain any monies remaining after the college tuition is paid, and often a balance does remain. This occurs when the actual tuition charges are less than the amount prorated on a per course basis. The tuition bill, without room or board costs, for a full time college-enrolled student can be less than the tax dollars allocated to the district for a full-time enrolled high school student.

From a taxpayer's standpoint, dual enrollment also provides a tax savings. It simply takes more tax dollars to pay for a student to take a course twice -- first in a high school and again later in a college -- if he or she can succeed the first time with the college course.

Benefits of Postsecondary Options

Recent legislation provides new opportunities for increased student achievement and produces significant educational reform. Through a simple model that gives students the choice of enrolling simultaneously in more than one educational institution, post-secondary options raise the ceiling on what high school students are permitted to learn; provides access for all students, regardless of a family's ability to pay; directs that tax dollars purchase the most challenging curriculum offered; and promotes efficient use of a state's existing educational institutions and programs.

Legislation can work to improve the educational experiences for bright children. If your state has not yet adopted post-secondary options legislation, or is missing some desirable elements provided in other states, you may want to discuss these ideas with your legislative representative. ❖

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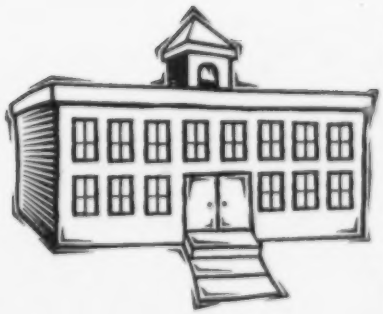
In Practice-- Dual Enrollment

Monique Lloyd

In October 1993 the high school counselor in my small, rural Oregon school district told me that my 12-year-old son, who had been grade and subject accelerated, would graduate at age 14 because there would be no classes left for him to take. Jack didn't want to graduate that early. He also had three younger brothers who would be facing the same situation. Dual high school and community college enrollment wasn't an option, the counselor told me, because of the college's minimum age requirement.

I started researching. The community college catalogue stated they required a minimum age of 16 for dual enrollment, yet they also claimed they didn't age discriminate. I continued my research at the University of Oregon Law Library. There I found a federal law, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, which states that recipients of federal funds cannot not use age distinctions to exclude, deny or limit individuals' participation in programs. Two exceptions are allowed: if age distinctions are established under authority of law or if it reasonably takes age into account. I looked at every Oregon community college policy; all had similar age restrictions. I also found other parents with children in circumstances similar to mine. On June 1, 1994, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) accepted my complaint against Oregon's community college system, alleging age discrimination in admissions.

While the OCR ruled in December, 1994 that Oregon's community colleges did not age discriminate because the state's compulsory attendance law requires students to attend K-12 schools until graduation or the age of 18, it didn't end there. During the preceding six months Jack and I had been interviewed several times on TV news programs in the state's largest cities. The complaint received front-page coverage in every major Oregon newspaper and strong editorial support from the newspaper based in Salem, Oregon's capital. The State Board of Education chairperson was quoted as stating this problem had to be addressed. In October, the Washington, D.C.-based *Chronicle for Higher Education* published a feature article. The district added more advanced classes as well as distance learning options, and I had discovered the power of the press and public opinion. After the ruling was issued I began talking to state legislators.



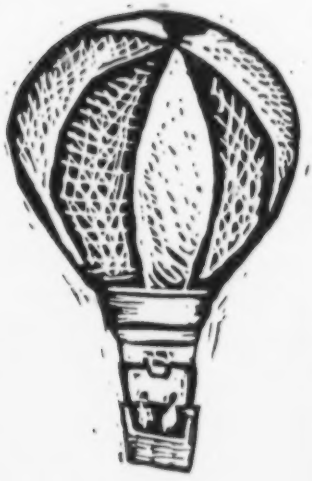
In May 1995 Oregon had a new law allowing students under 16 to dual-enroll under certain conditions. By the following January my district had negotiated an agreement with the local community college allowing gifted students who have exhausted the district's offerings to dual-enroll in community college classes with no limit on the number of classes and no minimum age requirements.

Jack just turned 15 and is completing the last available high school classes, along with foreign languages through the district's satellite dish program and AP calculus through Stanford University's EPGY program. He will add community college classes in chemistry, physics, computer programming and literature as a dual-enrolled high school senior next year, graduating in 1998 at age 16. ❖

***Monique Lloyd** lives in Oregon with her husband and their four gifted sons. She has recently begun an Internet mailing list to discuss Oregon TAG-related educational issues. She is a founder and board member of the TAG Family Network.*

Above & Beyond

Susan Winebrenner



Susan Winebrenner, *from Michigan, presents workshops on a variety of topics, but her first love is teaching gifted children. She is the author of Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom and Teaching Kids with Learning Disabilities in the Regular Classroom.*

The Legal Right To Be Educated

When I first started teaching, there was no such thing as "special education." We had kids of all kinds in heterogeneous classes, although those with profound "handicaps" were generally educated in separate classes or schools. But we certainly had the students who in later years would be noticed as having "exceptional educational needs." We had children with learning disabilities before they were labeled as such; we called them "slow or remedial." There were others with emotional and behavior problems; we called them "difficult." We had some who had visual or hearing impairments, those with poor handwriting and others who could never learn their number facts. And we had children who were called "gifted," those whose learning levels and needs were as different from "normal or average" as were the learning levels and needs of kids we described as those with learning problems. And we taught them all.

Then, in the 70s, a federal law was enacted (PL94-12) which mandated that students with "exceptional educational needs" have special services made available to them so they could get the support needed to help them move up to regular grade-level expectations. School districts and special education agencies were generously funded by the federal government to provide all kinds of special services for designated students. Ironically, very few states considered gifted students to be eligible for these services, seriously contending that such students did not have "exceptional educational needs."

This is indeed an astonishing position.

If we consider the range of abilities that students in a typical regular class represent, we would notice that there are students at both ends of that range for whom the regular curriculum content, pacing, amount and/or levels are inappropriate. When teachers notice students having trouble keeping up with grade-level expectations, adjustments are automatically made. Teachers change the content by teaching missing prerequisite skills and understandings; they change the pacing by slowing things down somewhat; they allow some students to produce smaller amounts of work; and they try to find an appropriate instructional level, knowing full well that those adjustments will cause students to be working with "differentiated curriculum," different from what has been assigned to a particular grade level or class.

Students at the other end of the range, for whom the regular content, pacing, amount and/or levels are too easy, should be equally eligible for such differentiation using a similar rationale. To argue that these students do not have "exceptional educational needs" is ridiculous. These students are just as atypical when compared to their age peers as are those who have received decades' worth of special education services with funds our lawmakers have not hesitated to make readily available. Although services for gifted students have been "mandated" in many states, the mandates were generally not funded, causing school districts to scramble for support money and then to abandon those services as soon as serious budget threats were perceived.

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Presently, the attitude about special education has changed. Since, over time, students in special education classes by and large lost ground in achieving learning outcomes commensurate with grade level expectations, the attitude now is to place them in regular classrooms so their exposure to regular education students and to higher expectations may provide them with a better chance to enjoy higher achievement. According to present law, this is referred to as placing them in the "least restrictive environment" which means that the learning environment should never "restrict" a student's learning potential.

Research studies document that for gifted students, the least restrictive learning environment is with other students of similar learning abilities. However, gifted programs and classes are giving way to the sentiment that if it is better for special education students to be in heterogeneous classes, such classes must also be better for gifted students. What is actually happening in many mixed-ability classes is that the most capable learners are sacrificing their learning needs to what is best for most other students.

What can concerned parents and teachers do about this situation? I am convinced that the only way to advocate for the rights of students with exceptional ability in academic areas is to work within the belief system of the school or district. Here are some suggestions:

• Give up the term "gifted." It is no longer appropriate to apply it only to students with exceptional ability in academic areas. Definitions of intelligence have changed to acknowledge that there are multiple ways to express intelligence.

• Advocate your interest in having schools provide challenge for all students including those with advanced learning levels. All parents have the right to ask any teacher to explain how a particular student is being challenged in any class or subject.

• Find out what the school's "mission statement" promises; ask if students who need accelerated content or pacing are receiving what has been promised.

• Ask if administrators and teachers believe all students should learn something new and challenging every day they are in school. Demonstrate how students with advanced learning abilities experience much lost time as they wait for a chance to move ahead from what they already know and can do.

• Ask if educators believe in providing high self-esteem-building learning experiences for all students. Point out that self-esteem is enhanced when students learn things that are challenging. Because students with exceptional academic ability spend most of their school time with work that is not challenging, their self-esteem may suffer as they fear they will never be able to rise to a challenge when it occurs. Help others understand that students who have to pretend not to be so smart or capable are losing self-esteem as they discover they cannot reveal who they really are and how much they really know.

• Advocate for "cluster grouping" for kids with similar needs for accelerated content or pacing. No one wants to be "one-of-a-kind" in a class in which the pressure to conform and be like everyone else can be overwhelming. Schools all across America "cluster" special education students with similar needs so they can have others to relate to and so the special education teachers' time with them can be more efficient than if they had to visit one or two kids with a particular learning challenge in every classroom in the school. *For free information on cluster grouping for high ability learners, contact the ERIC Clearinghouse on the Internet at http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec.htm and request ERIC Digest EDO-EC-95-1, or make your request by phone at 1-800-328-0272.*

• Be noticed at school board meetings. Districts in which parents of highly capable learners continue to advocate for appropriately challenging educational opportunities for their children are districts in which programs and services are maintained. It's as simple as that! ❖

Homeschooling the Gifted- A Personal Introduction

Deborah Haydock

***Deborah Haydock** was employed in psychiatry and personnel before becoming a stay-at-home mom and home educator. She also works as a freelance writer.*

Homeschooling the Gifted A Personal Introduction

My husband and I have a sensitive, intense, often complex, highly gifted 6-year-old son who is spending his childhood at home with us. Chris does not attend public or private school, although he once attended a Montessori preschool. He is one of thousands of children across the U.S. who is "homeschooled," a term used to define ways of guiding a child's education at home. Parents choose homeschooling for many reasons, and having a gifted child who is different from the norm, with differing needs, is becoming more common all the time.

I remember my first phone call to a Maine homeschooling support group leader, long before my son was of school age. I spoke with Earl Stevens, regular contributing author to *Home Education* magazine, and a wise and gentle father who had completely homeschooled his son, then 14 years old. Earl spoke with a refined confidence about his bright and happy son, taking his first college course (Latin). I'll never forget his words, "Homeschooling is raising your child in a constant atmosphere of love."

That's it, I thought. As the mother of a bright, complicated youngster, my instincts directed me first to consider love, self-esteem, protection. I knew no one other than his father and I had the motivation and perseverance to understand this child. Chris read at 3, was passionate about multiplication and much preferred to play by himself than to be with children his age. My husband and I wondered what in the world he would do in kindergarten, fearing his boredom and its consequences. From early on we knew we needed to be assured, day in and day out, that his will, his spirit and his freedom to learn what he wanted to learn would be protected. Homeschooling offered us this peace of mind.

Being formally schooled ourselves, we still needed support to make the choice. We read everything we could find on homeschooling and then found a support group which provided us the last bit of confidence we needed. The range of people in this group was incredible, from veteran homeschoolers to parents on the verge of taking their pre-teens out of school. Among them were former teachers, parents with degrees, parents with little or no higher education, people from all walks of life, voicing concern for their children and their education and discussing solutions. Hearing their stories was invaluable to us in making our decision.

SOME OF THE WHYS

Families choose to homeschool for a variety of reasons:

I: Religious

Until recently it was believed that most who homeschooled did so for religious reasons. Although many devout families educate their children at home to impart religious values or ethnic heritage, at least as many, if not more, have other primary motivations.

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II: Academic
Parents want a different curriculum or environment for their children than school offers. Perhaps they wish to direct their children's education with more challenging coursework, common for homeschooling gifted children, or use multiple grade levels to fit an individual child's needs, often necessary for the gifted. Other families seek to teach subjects underserved or lacking in some schools. There are even those parents (like my husband and me) who desire the absence of traditional coursework altogether, allowing for learning through life experiences.

• Learning Styles. Some children suffer in school because their modes of learning differ dramatically from the methods being used to teach, and these differences can be even more pronounced in the gifted. Many visual learners struggle with having to grasp information through the auditory channel. Others are kinesthetic and learn best through movement and active pursuits. There are children who love to read and those who learn better by doing hands-on work (mechanics, arts and crafts). Divergent thinkers are often generally out of step with traditional approaches to presentation of material. In these days of inclusion and large classrooms, it's difficult for schools to meet the varied needs of all children, and more so those of the gifted in particular. Homeschooling offers an easier, and often more expedient, means of providing gifted children the individual attention their differences require.

• Unique Interests. Home education allows the passionate youngster a chance to delve into those deliriously different interests he or she may have. Gifted children often have powerful "callings" which, I believe, should be honored, despite how unusual they may seem. Having choice and control in our lives is important for all of us, and it seems very important for gifted children to follow their deep passions and needs. I knew of a profoundly gifted girl who spent her time growing "mold experiments" in various parts of the house. At our house, my son has always preferred his multiplication video to any kind of TV, computers and card games to action-hero figures. His best friends are imaginary numbers (lately we've been hearing a lot about his friend the "2"). At home, molds, numbers, or whatever the passion, can be pursued in depth and at length.

III: Personality and Temperament
If your child is gifted, or especially if he or she is highly or profoundly gifted, you know all too well what it means to have a different, or asynchronous, child. You probably wonder if you're the only parent who has seen this behavior, you pour through books and journals looking for answers, you wring your hands in frustration. One day you're elated your child is so bright or creative, the next you're cursing that mighty I.Q. For any number of reasons, having this kind of child in a structured environment tailored more to average children can be incredibly frustrating for all.

• Activity Level. Although our first concerns about our gifted son attending school were academic, we also sensed that his personality was completely wrong for the structure of a classroom. When Chris was a toddler, sitting through story-hour at the library was stressful. He likes to move around and has no tolerance for boredom; he's either thrilled or he's "out of there." Our little man also has a tendency to joyously run and jump when he's learned something (very kinesthetic). We love watching his innocent enthusiasm but know this would not earn him any appreciation in a classroom.

• Mental Complexity. In addition to having a physically active child, our son is mentally complex. Chris has strong feelings and ideas about things that we don't always understand, like having many rituals. For instance,

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Homeschooling

Continued

he must always enter and exit a room or building the same exact way, and if we refuse to go along with him, he completely loses control. He seems to need this order to feel sane. So, we try to "choose our battles wisely" and allow him these behaviors. At home there's no need to explain to others why he must walk down the stairs exactly in time with us. We can go with the flow. Homeschooling often means taking the path of least resistance.

• Ethical Complexity. Having Chris has taught us to expect the unexpected, and he certainly has taught us a good deal. When he was 3, he began to have dramatic fits of anger whenever an adult said, "Good job!" From lots of reading, especially Alfie Kohn's *Punished by Rewards*, we came to understand that our son experienced praise as judgment and that someone was offering an opinion he hadn't asked for. Chris was clearly aware, when we or others weren't, of the power implication of praise. He's had similar reactions to competitive games, and has literally fallen to the ground crying whenever he (or even the other team) is tagged "out." How much smoother for us, and happier for Chris, to be able to work on these sensitive issues at home and to not be faced with them day in and day out in school.

• Social Complexity/Socialization. Our son, like many gifted children, often feels awkward with other children. Unless we find the magical common denominator between Chris and another child, there is no playing. For a long time, whenever I'd ask my son if he played with anyone at preschool, he'd say, "Why do you want me to play with kids so much, Mom? You know I'm not that kind of child!" We've gotten used to this idea and feel it makes no sense to put Chris in school for "socialization."

Interestingly, I now realize that the best socialization, if we define this by the quality of closeness (i.e. trust, openness, deep communication), takes place out of school. My own deepest, most valuable friendships as a child came from neighborhood pals, and I don't think my experience was uncommon. Long talks on the front steps, building forts in the woods, sleep-overs, all offered the makings for real friendships; it was only outside of school that I had the freedom, the environment and the wealth of time that allowed for the building of intimacy.

This is always a major area of question. Many not acquainted with a homeschooling way of life voice concerns about social contacts and opportunities for homeschooled children. After school and weekends, homeschoolers have the opportunity to interact with schooled children and neighbors and/or on weekdays with other homeschooled children. Both formally organized or informal local groups have numerous get-togethers: weekly gym time, baseball or basketball games, swimming, bowling, ice and roller skating, game days at the library. And of course there are karate, gymnastics, dance, scouting, community sports, theater, etc.

A child home with a parent and siblings, or doing errands with Mom or Dad practices socialization all day long. Homeschooled children are often very well socialized, as they come into contact with a much wider range of ages, and types of people, than children spending their days in classrooms of same-age peers.

MANY ROADS TO LEARNING — METHODS

Because the soul of education at home is individual choice, freedom, flexibility and creativity, no two families homeschool alike. There are some distinctly different styles.

• Using Structured Curricula

The most formal way to homeschool is to purchase a prepared curriculum (hundreds are available) and teach children subjects at home. In essence, this is recreating school at home and works well for many families. Some curricula are structured according to grade levels, while others place more emphasis on the spiritual and artistic side of children. A wide variety are advertised in magazines and journals devoted to homeschooling and are available in larger bookstores.

Of course it's important to research methods of study and match curriculum choice to a particular child's needs and personality. Often families who homeschool this way pick one time of the day for structured learning and reserve another block of time for field trips or individual, child-selected projects.

Many parents who remove their children from school often feel best first using structured learning materials. With the passage of time, however, some find that their children learn more, and more happily, without these formalized materials. These families evolve

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toward a more relaxed form of homeschooling known as "unschooling."

• Unschooling
In the unschooling method, the child is allowed to learn out of his or her own passions, curiosities, needs, experiences and interactions with the larger world. This approach springs from an observation that all children want to play, create and explore their world, and from these very natural actions and encounters, they learn. The parents' role is to guide and support, to notice and act at times ripe for learning and to provide the necessary tools and experiences for learning (i.e., books, field trips, games, etc.). Learning is never forced.

A mother using a curriculum to teach math might present a lesson on fractions and give her child specific math problems to work out, while the unschooling mother would wait until her child expresses an interest. When measuring out water or spices to make oatmeal, for example, mother and child might launch into a larger discussion of fractions based on their measurements. These real life experiences, which happen throughout every day, are the methods unschoolers look for and capitalize on to pass on information and foster learning.

In our case, it didn't suit me to use a curriculum, mostly because I'm not comfortable playing "teacher" and Chris is so very much his own person. But I see that he's learning all the time, throughout the day, in countless ways, without me imposing "learning situations" on him. He loves to fill out catalog order forms, for example, and to count change at the grocery store. Today, when we were restless waiting in the veterinarian's office, we counted areas of tile squares and practiced multiplication.

• An Eclectic Model
Some homeschooling families use a mixture of formal learning tools and natural learning techniques. Although they may credit the benefit of learning through life experiences, they also embrace the use of textbooks or other formal materials to teach their children. Some parents may insist on curriculum for the basics, like reading and writing, and allow the rest of their children's learning to be self-directed.

• Partial School Attendance
Many school districts allow home educated students to participate in classes or extra-curricular activities of their choice. For example, a child may be homeschooled 75% of the time and attend a school science and math class for the remaining time. This approach allows children to take advantage of the resources a school offers (science lab, for instance) that might prove too difficult or expensive to set up at home. Others may simply want opportunities in sports or the arts.

Families often homeschool through high school, then send their children on to college for formal education. Many excellent schools actively recruit homeschooled students who, they say, typically display in-depth knowledge, independent thinking and love of learning.

In truth, there are as many ways to homeschool as there are interested families. For families with gifted children, with their creative personalities, intense temperaments and multiple complexities, homeschooling can offer creative solutions to problematic situations. My husband and I have chosen home education for many reasons; perhaps first and foremost is to provide our gifted, sensitive and often vulnerable son with a nurturing environment in which to learn. We choose unschooling as our method as it suits our values and provides our passionate youngster with the chance to pursue his particular interests in the relaxed, fun and atypical way that suits him.

To those who ask how I do it, have my son at home all day, I respond that I could never send him off to a place where I feel his needs can't be met. At home Chris has the freedom to be himself and march to the beat of his own (very loud) drum. There is a beauty, simplicity and naturalness to living and learning together, and we are grateful for the opportunity to live our lives so closely together. ❖

Suggested Reading

Books:
Teach Your Own and *How Children Learn* by John Holt, 1983, Addison-Wesley
Homeschooling for Excellence by David and Micki Colfax, 1988, Warner Books
Family Matters by David Guterson, 1993, Harcourt Brace
I Learn Better by Teaching Myself by Agnes Leistico, 1990, Home Education Press
Punished by Rewards -- The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A's, praise, and other bribes by Alfie Kohn, 1993, Houghton Mifflin
The Teenage Liberation Handbook by Grace Llewellyn, 1991, Lowry House

Periodicals:
Home Education, Home Education Press, PO Box 1083,Tonasket, WA 98855
Growing Without Schooling, 2269 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140

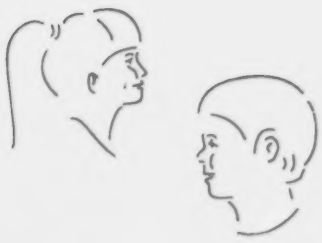
ParentSpace

Laura Goodman

Labels, More or Less

Babies and clothes have very little in common; they both start out new, which is about the extent of it. That's what I was thinking not long ago when I came home with a new winter coat. It had several labels sewn in and many a tag attached, telling me exactly what I'd bought — the brand and style and fiber content, complete with detailed instructions for its cleaning and care. Everything I needed to know to insure comfort and long wear was there in writing, satisfaction guaranteed. Looking them over, it occurred to me that raising children would be an awful lot easier if babies came with such a set of thorough content details and directions. Alas, they don't, and from the beginning we're on our own. And the task becomes even more complex and challenging when our children are born gifted.

More and more today, it seems that what parents, educators, psychologists and counselors do, in an attempt to easily and beneficially identify what they've got and what to do with it, is use the ever-growing body of information and research to retro-fit kids with appropriate labels and tags. Now, I'm of two minds about the merits of attaching labels to children, and I don't see it as an all-or-nothing proposition. For starters, just knowing your youngster is above the norm in brainpower doesn't go far in helping you make educational decisions on his or her behalf. It's good to know what you've got in a gifted child — the degree of giftedness, what kind of thinker he is, whether she's more introverted or extroverted, through which channels he learns most easily, whether she has learning difficulties, the condition of his self-concept, etc. These days, those attributes, and more, can be fairly reliably estimated and, as labels, attached, all of which contribute to the clarification of types of children and their needs and then to helping find or create situations which best suit them.



Consider two simple, if not rather simplistic, examples. First, there's Keene. His parents didn't know what to do with their 6-year-old obviously bright, rambunctious son. He was ripping apart his 1st-grade classroom, not learning much, not doing much but making trouble, as well as enemies of many of his fellow students and, increasingly, his teacher. As part of a preliminary general assessment, he took part in a group-administered IQ test; surprisingly, Keene's scores placed him in the 98 percentile. From there, other tests and inventories were administered and he was found to have an IQ in the 140s, along with a moderately severe learning disability; the report also suggested a medical evaluation for ADHD. Within two months, Keene had gone from being a naughty 1st-grade boy to an identified gifted but learning disabled visual-spatial thinker with possible ADHD. That year in his public school, and in the years following, through his IEP (Individualized Learning Plan) he was regularly out-sourced to both the GATE specialist and the Special Ed teacher. Keene got lots of helpful attention.

Then there's Mariah, a young woman I know who was tested early on because she seemed so bright but scored in the barely gifted range, certainly not high enough to qualify for her elementary school's TAG

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***Laura Goodman** is a fiction writer, editor and mother of a gifted child, not necessarily in that order.*

program. There was no further testing or evaluation for Mariah, nor special enrichment or accommodations made, because her label read "pretty much average." Despite her "average" tag, she was an avid, advanced reader and an amazing writer of fiction and poetry, through the years filling cardboard boxes and old suitcases with spiral notebooks of poems and stories and novels. She let me see these once, and I was astounded by their volume and quality; she finished her first novel in 6th grade. I asked her if she'd shown these to her parents or teachers along the way, if people knew she was writing. Yes, she told me, but nobody seemed too interested. I can't help wondering now, if she'd had a gifted label attached wouldn't she have received some significant encouragement and support at home and/or school? At 17 now, Mariah sometimes discusses life and the world with me, cites literary references and makes cogent comments that startle me. She's one of the most gifted young people I've come across in a long time, and this obviously brilliant girl isn't sure whether she'll go to college, whether she's *smart enough* to try.

Attaching labels did wonders for Keene and nothing for Mariah.

Labels, even if they're appropriate, are worthwhile only to a certain point. As long as they're helpful, they have value. As long as parents and teachers and other professionals use them to maintain a wide-open approach to the whole individual, they're worth the time, effort and expense they can require. But when the label is incorrect or gets the focus, fostering a sort of tunnel vision, people forget to look past it to that young, ever-growing and -changing human being to whom it's attached. I think of Marshall McLuhan and his cautionary words about the medium being the message. We must never mistake the label for the child.

I'd say gifted children are both message *and* messengers and that remembering that is key. Their message is that they are who and what they are — bundles of high intelligence and growth and potential; as messengers they *will* tell us how to work with them, how to help them realize their potential, if we only listen. One of our first big jobs as their parents is to listen. So we work hard to decipher what the messengers are saying, trying to figure out which labels apply and what they mean so that more individual help can come to them sooner. But we must attend constantly, watching and staying alert to the messenger, because the message he or she brings is, by nature, in a state of constant synthesis. We also must recognize and be willing to cut off those tags we've attached when they begin to impede or no longer serve these young lives. ❖

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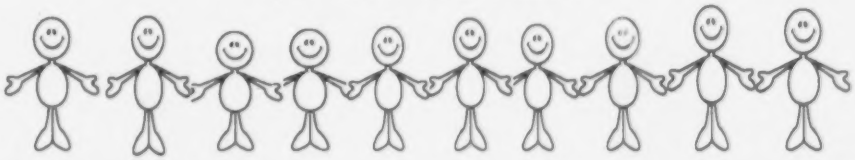

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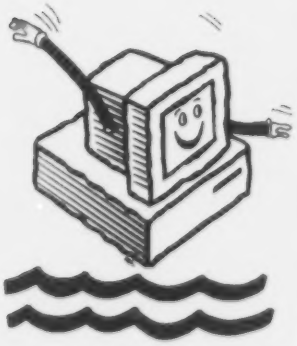
Surfing the Net

Sandra Berger

For an increasing number of children, formal schooling takes place beyond the traditional classroom building. A 1995 ERIC digest states that roughly half a million children are learning outside the classroom. Although specific statistics are not available, personal experience indicates that many homeschooling families have children who are gifted. Only a few years ago, resources for home education were scarce; in some places, the public library was the only place parents could get material and the nearest comprehensive library might have been too far away to be a practical resource. But nowadays, the Internet provides a wealth of resources—everything from support groups to resources to curriculum— and the Internet "explosion" of web sites has expanded educational opportunities well beyond what I believed could ever be.

Another reason why homeschooling families should make an Internet connection (and e-mail service) a high priority relates to keeping accurately informed on proposed state and federal legislation that might have a future effect on their choice to educate their children outside the "mainstream" public or private schools. For example, several years ago, a piece of legislation called HR6 contained a bill that had potential for damage to homeschools. One of the homeschool advocacy groups FAXed an alert to homeschool support groups and publications. Although the number of folks with e-mail capability was relatively small, the advocacy group used the Internet to get the word out. The introduction of HR6 generated a lot of misinformation, which was quickly cleared up via FAX and e-mail. Technology, in this case, might have fanned the fire of misinformation, but the speed with which FAX and e-mail operate compensated and was a distinct factor in providing accurate information before misinformation could cause people to act impulsively. The Internet has a lot to offer, but, as in other areas, it is important to listen wisely and select sources of information carefully.

This column focuses on some of the Internet sites that provide general information on homeschooling. Because there might be thousands of web sites, I have tried to provide primary links that lead to other links. Future columns will provide information on specific resources in each academic discipline that homeschoolers may find useful. So, are you ready? Launch your browser and let's surf the Internet.



—> AskERIC InfoGuides
URL: *gopher://ericir.syr.edu:70/11/InfoGuides/Alphabetical_List_of_InfoGuides*

AskERIC InfoGuides are a type of online publication that points educators and others to Internet, ERIC and traditional print resources dealing with specific topics of interest. They have been written by Syracuse University graduate students, and topics vary according to student interest, from AIDS education and anthropology to women's literature and year-round education. In the introduction section of each InfoGuide, the author defines the topic and parameters (intended audience, context, specific focus).

InfoGuides are very useful tools because they point you directly to

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sources of information. They are listed alphabetically at the above address. Just cursor down the alphabetical list until you find one you want to read online or download, and open it. (To open an online document, most people press the keyboard "return" or "enter" key.) Hint: *Avoid using the InfoGuide search engine because it doesn't always understand the user's command.*

—> Home Education Resources Center (HERC)
URL: *http://www.cts.com/~netsales/herc/index.html*
HERC, a commercial site, is a primary link to state homeschooling regulations, homeschool support groups (by state) and education resources. There's a fair amount of advertising, so if you're looking for education catalogs you can send for theirs online. Hint: *The above URL contains a tilde(~). Some Internet servers have a filtering system that blocks out certain URLs to prevent children from accessing inappropriate material. If yours has such a filter, you may get a "can't access" error message.*

—> Home Educator's Resources Online (HERO)
URL: *http://www.vv.cta.com/~snowline/hero/welcome.html*
HERO provides federal, state and international alerts about legislation that may affect homeschoolers. They send e-mail alerts to people on their mailing list. To get on the mailing list complete their interactive online form. Unfortunately when I visited the site the form was not working so I can't tell you what type of information they ask for. (The joys of technology are not always as joyous as they appear!)

—> Homeschoolers Organization List
URL: *http://alumni.caltech.edu/~casner/statelist.html*
This list has some addresses that are slightly different from other lists of homeschool organizations. Since list owners may not keep their resources up to date, it's helpful to have more than one list of contact people for the organizations.

—> The Homespun Web of Home Educational Resources
URL: *http://www.ictheweb.com/hs-web/*

The Homespun Web is relatively new to the Internet and a welcome addition. People talk about the age of resources on the Net in terms of dog years: One year of life equals seven people years. New resources come and go frequently, and when they contribute something new that makes them worth talking about. This particular site offers an online network you can join.

Although such networks must be used with common sense and extreme caution, they can be handy for exchanging information about resources and useful Internet sites. Cautions: 1) never give anyone your home address or telephone number, and 2) you may get a lot of unwelcome advertising or other e-mail. The network includes a link to "ask an expert," a group of folks who have volunteered to respond to questions in their area of expertise. The Homespun Web includes a list of homeschool organizations worldwide and a useful subject category index.

—> Jon's Homeschool Resource Page
URL: *http://www.midnightbeach.com/hs/*

Jon Shemitz has amassed an incredible number of resources, and, best of all, he is in the process of organizing the resources in categories that seem to make sense—newsgroups, mailing lists, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), resources, organizations, people and paper resources such as books and periodicals. He also has a "what's new" section for folks who visit frequently and don't want to revisit everything, and an "old new" section that does the same thing. My favorite link is FQAs, Frequently Questioned Answers.
URL: *http://www.midnightbeach.com/hs/fqa.htm*

—> National Center for Home Education
URL: *http://www.learnathome.com/nchehome.htm*

This organization was founded in 1990 by the Home School Legal Defense Association. They provide homeschool resources to organizations such as homeschool support groups and individuals who are in leadership positions. They also monitor legislation, send alerts and serve as an information clearinghouse. This is an advocacy group, so some of their information might not be presented in objective terms.

—> National Home Education Research Institute home page
URL:*//www.learnathome.com/nheri/*

THE NHERI, a non-profit organization, is known for surveys

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and research. If you want to know about homeschoolers' achievement levels or social and emotional adjustment, this is the site for you. It is one of the few homeschooler web sites that provides educational fact sheets. Their estimate on numbers of homeschooled children is higher than most, but for advocacy purposes it might be useful.

—> New Mexico State University gopher site
URL: *gopher://lib.NMSU.EDU:70/11/.subjects/Education/Homeschooling*

This gopher site leads to a number of good bibliographies. There are no pretty graphics and hot links, but the information is useful.

USING THE WWW SEARCH ENGINES

Previous *Understanding Our Gifted* columns have provided information on using the World Wide Search Engines, but some of their URLs are worth repeating. These search engines vary in the information they produce, so try more than one if you are looking for something. The more you use these engines, the easier it will get. When I know exactly what I'm looking for, I find Excite and Yahoo the easiest to use. Hint: *Be sure to read the help sheets before using a search engine, and be as specific as you can in your use of search terms.*

—> Altavista
URL: *http://www.altavista.digital.com/*
—> Excite
URL: *http://www.excite.com*
—> Infoseek
URL: *http://www.infoseek.com/*
The homeschool category— 72 links—is at
URL: *http://www.infoseek.com/education/Home_schooling*
—> Lycos
URL: *http://lycos.cs.cmu.edu*
—> WEB Crawler
URL: *http://WWW.WebCrawler.com*
—> Yahoo
URL: *http://www.yahoo.com/*
The homeschool category has its own search engine and is at
URL: *http://www.yahoo.com/Education/K_12/Alternative/Home_Schooling*

OTHER WAYS OF FINDING INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

A URL is an Internet address. After you have some experience with searching the Internet, you will begin to understand how URLs work. At that point, you can try guessing what an organization's URL might be. For example, I wondered if the American Library Association (ALA) might have something on homeschooling. I guessed the URL might be *http://www.ala.org*, and was rewarded with the ALA homepage. How did I guess? URLs are constructed by using a set of conventions. One of those conventions is the "domain name," which identifies the type of system the "somewhere" is. I knew that the ALA domain would be "org," which stands for "organization." If you are looking for an educational institution, the URL is likely to contain the domain name "edu." Federal government URLs contain the domain name "gov." Commercial sites use "com."

Another example: I wondered what the major news magazines had published on homeschooling. So I typed *http://www.usnews.com*. *Voila*! Want to find out if The College Board has procedures that will allow homeschoolers to take AP courses and exams? Type *http://www.collegeboard.org/*. Pay attention to the specific construction of a URL, and you'll quickly learn how to get places on the World Wide Web when you don't have a URL or a map.

Bye for now. Wave if you see me surfing. ❖

sberger@inet.ed.gov

The ideas expressed in this article are the author's, and do not necessarily represent the views of the CEC or ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.

Creative Ventures

Jerry Flack

When Artists Speak

In a perceptive and entertaining book, *An Anthropology of Everyday Life: An Autobiography*, anthropologist Edward T. Hall recounts a somewhat chaotic childhood and adolescence which found him often living with artists and their families. In one particularly insightful comment, he writes:

A spinoff from my long and deep association with artists is that whenever I come up against a tough, virtually insoluble problem in my own work and am stymied, I turn to the artists. There isn't much they haven't thought about or tried to do, few problems they haven't tried to solve or shed some light on. (Hall, p. 60)

There is much indeed that young people can learn about creativity and problem solving from the artists with whom they are most familiar — the illustrators of their favorite childhood picture books. I have long believed that it is important for gifted, creative and talented children to learn about how people work. How do creative adults give birth to magnificent products? Where do artists and writers find their ideas? How do they discover unique media and techniques that become their hallmarks? Happily, there's been a recent flowering of books and other media in children's literature which, collectively, provides answers to all these questions and more.

Books about artists and illustrators fall into two broad categories: collective profiles and self-reports, and individual autobiographies. There are several collective works now in libraries and on book store shelves. The best is probably Pat Cummings' *Talking with Artists*, which was awarded the 1992 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for the best children's nonfiction book of the year. This volume features conversations with Caldecott Medalists Leo and Diane Dillon, Richard Egielski, Chris Van Allsburg and David Wiesner, along with profiles of other noted illustrators, Lois Ehlert, Jerry Pinkney and Lane Smith. Special features of *Talking with Artists* include elementary school photographs of the artists, samples of their childhood artwork, as well as contemporary photographs and artwork. The text follows a question-and-answer format with the illustrators sharing stories of how they found their way into the field of children's book illustration, where they find ideas, what a typical workday is like for them and general information about their homes, children and pets. Lois Ehlert, for example, recalls how her parents devoted a corner of the family dining room as her place for doing art. From her card table work space in the family dining room, she created all kinds of projects. She also explains how she uses the art technique of collage in her work, how she fashioned her first book from sketches, devised a cardboard cover, sewed the pages together and took the completed product to New York City in search of a publisher. After being turned down many times, she finally succeeded.

One really valuable lesson students will learn from a reading of the profiles in this and other collections is that success rarely comes easily.

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***Jerry Flack**, President's Teaching Scholar and Professor of Gifted Education at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is the author of Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors and Lives of Promise.*

When Artists Speak

Continued

Tenacity and faith in their talents and abilities figure highly in virtually all artists' personal stories. Cummings (1995), a highly accomplished illustrator herself, has followed up with *Talking with Artists, Volume Two*, in which she features another group of children's books illustrators, including Floyd Cooper, Kevin Henkes, William Joyce, Maira Kalman, Vera Williams and Brian Pinkney. Pinkney explains his scratchboard technique, and Kevin Henkes tells why he loves to draw the mice characters found in *Owen* and *Julius, Baby of the World*.

Deborah Kovacs and James Preller (1991, 1993) interviewed 120 creators of children's and adolescent literature for their two volumes of *Meet the Authors and Illustrators*. Legendary talents of children's literature Maurice Sendak, Tomie dePaola, Trina Schart Hyman, Ed Young and Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) share practical advice, inspiration, even whimsy, in short but insightful vignettes. Dr. Seuss, for example, claimed that he discovered all of his ideas annually on August 4th in the Swiss Alps village of Uber Gletch where he took cuckoo clock for its annual physical check-up. Diane and Leo Dillon address the importance of collaboration. The two-time winners of the Caldecott Medal, honoring the year's best illustrated children's book, note that when they first met as art students they were fiercely competitive but eventually came to believe in the importance of combining their talents. "It is important," Leo says, "that we work on the same piece of art in such a way that nobody knows who did what" (p. 30).

Profiles are complemented with photographs of the illustrators and dust jackets of their most famous works. In the second volume of *Meet the Authors and Illustrators* (1993), readers are introduced to Graeme Base (of *Animalia* fame), Jan Brett, Paul Goble, Ruth Heller, Karla Kuskin, Faith Ringgold, Allan Say, Peter Sis and Peter Spier. Australian Graeme Base notes that he always tries to carry a sketchbook with him, and he describes how an around-the-world trip with his wife supplied the raw materials for his creative thinking which culminated in his fantasy-mystery picture book, *The Eleventh Hour*. He relates how art proved to be a means to survival in childhood, when his family moved from England to Australia. "I was a little kid who couldn't speak properly. I didn't know the rules of Australian football. But I could draw pictures like nobody else in class" (p. 79). One of the real virtues of *Meet the Authors and Illustrators* is that each profile ends with a challenge for student readers to create a unique project of their own. For example, after learning that Jan Brett loves to draw pictures of her favorite animal, the hedgehog, students are encouraged to focus on something special they love and draw it from many perspectives.

Lee Bennett Hopkins is a poet, teacher and anthologist who is especially well known for his collections of verse for young people. For several decades he wrote to his colleagues in the children's literature field and asked them to respond to the same kinds of questions kids often

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asked of him, such as where and how he found ideas and his favorite childhood experiences/memories. In 1995, Hopkins (1995) edited *Pauses: Autobiographical Reflections of 101 Creators of Children's Books*. Although the entries are necessarily brief, given the number of respondents, the reminiscences and comments of such legendary illustrators as James Daugherty, Edgar and Ingri d'Aularire, Ezra Jack Keats and Arnold Lobel make wonderful reading. One of the joys of these sharings is learning how some of the classics of children's literature came into being. While creating murals for the Lever Brothers Building in Boston, Robert McCloskey became fascinated by the mallard ducks in Boston Public Gardens. Working as any truly gifted student should, McCloskey plunged into an intensive study of mallard ducks. He drew them from every conceivable angle. He consulted an ornithologist at Cornell University, and he studied stuffed specimens at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He even went to a market and purchased four squawking mallards as companions! The result was an American classic, a Caldecott Medal and one of the most popular children's book of all time, *Make Way for Ducklings*.

Richard C. Owen Publishers surely created their *Meet the Authors* series with both students and teachers in mind. Jane Yolen, Eve Bunting, Paul Goble, Patricia Polacco and James Howe are among the many authors and author-illustrators who share their lives and work in easily accessible prose in books such as Goble's (1994) *Hau Kola-Hello Friend*. Goble writes of growing up in Oxford, England where his mother was a musician and his father built harpsichords. In *Hau Kola*, he shares pictures of animals he made as a child as well as his many childhood hobbies: collections of pressed wild flowers, arrowheads, stamps, coins and an early fascination with the Indian people of North America. Goble is famous for his picture books and stories about Plains Indians, including *The Girl Who Loved Horses*, for which he won the Caldecott Medal. Through the generous use of color photographs, young people see Goble at work in his home studio and traveling to favorite sites for field studies. They learn that he uses essentially the same media he used as a child — pens, pencils and watercolors. They also learn that he has many days when he has little to show for his work but messy drawings!

Another stellar entry in the *Meet the Authors* series is Patricia Polacco's (1994) *Firetalking*. This creative author-illustrator talks about how storytelling, especially beside a fire, has been a vital ingredient in her life and of how the stories of her larger family, passed down from generation to generation, are the touchstone of all her work. In close-up photographs, students see the artist working on illustrations for a book from start to finish. Polacco is also the subject of a superb new video cassette produced by her publisher, Philomel Books. *Dream Keeper* opens with Polacco (1996) sitting in her favorite rocking chair in her Oakland, California home. Again, she accents the tremendous power of stories to inspire love and courage, to combat fear and to bring diverse people together in their common humanity. She shows viewers wonderful artifacts in her home, many of which find their way into such magical books as *Rechenka's Eggs* and *The Keeping Quilt*. Crucial to the video is Polacco's candid recounting of the childhood pain she felt because of learning disabilities. She speaks of the great frustrations she felt as a child whose dyslexia went undiagnosed and untreated for many years. The 23-minute videocassette is tremendously engaging and can be enjoyed equally by family and classroom audiences.

A second entry in the Philomel videocassette library, sure to fascinate young readers and future artists, is *Eric Carle: Picture Writer* (1993). The name of the film comes from the descriptor a young fan used to tag the famed illustrator of such works as Bill Martin, Jr.'s *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and his own masterpiece *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Carle emphasizes the fun that should be integral to every creation process. He also talks about the idea-finding process. He "discovered" the technique of using raised letter text on business cards and incorporated the practice in some of his books. "Nothing is really new except your imagination," he says. Carle takes viewers step-by-step through the production of his imaginative collage illustrations, showing how he creates a sort of assembly line of watercolor tissue papers that form the backgrounds for his fresh and colorful pages. The same process is illustrated with still photography in the newly published *The Art of Eric Carle* (1996), an omnibus book which serves as both an autobiography and a retrospective of his life's work. The artist tells of his exciting kindergarten experiences in Syracuse, New York, where he first discovered his love of art, and of his family's move back to Germany and the horrors he faced coming of age in Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

If the first two volumes in Heinemann's *Creative Sparks* series of autobiographies are an indication of what's to come,

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readers are in for many exciting adventures. Joanna Cole (1995) describes her personal and professional journey in *On the Bus with Joanna Cole: A Creative Autobiography*. The creator of the hugely popular *Magic School Bus* series describes how she drew upon her own elementary school experiences in fashioning the redoubtable Ms. Frizzle and also shares her own personal family story of literacy. Her father could not read, but from him she learned the art of storytelling and how to logically debate important issues. Her collaboration with illustrator Bruce Degen is highlighted through the reproduction of side-by-side dummy pages used in preparing *The Magic School Bus Inside a Hurricane*.

The second creative self-portrayal from Heinemann is *In Flight with David McPhail: A Creative Autobiography*. McPhail (1996) notes the origins of his affection for bears and pigs, which are found in such delightful books as *First Flight* and *Pigs Ahoy!* He leads readers on a step-by-step trip through the evolutionary process of how an idea becomes a book. McPhail shows preliminary thumbnail sketches, discusses how he determines whether to create cartoons or realistic drawings for a given story and how he labors to create special images of natural phenomena, such as rain, in two-dimensional picture books. *In Flight* is a joyful combination of autobiography and technical "how to" information. The book is liberally illustrated with samples of McPhail's rough sketches and art work from published books.

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After or during an examination of one or more of these fine resources, possibilities for activating student involvement are limitless. The following are but a few suggestions of starting points.

• For centuries, art students have learned their craft, in part, by imitating the works of past masters. Immerse students in the art of any of the popular illustrators mentioned and then ask them to create a single drawing or painting imitating the style, color, use of line or other distinguishing features of any of those.

• Kevin Henkes celebrates mice and David McPhail paints pigs and bears, and both use these animals over and over in the stories they tell and illustrate. Can students put the spotlight on other animal characters of their own choosing? Can they make a Holstein cow become the heroine of an illustrated tale? How about an owl, a raccoon or an alligator?

• Use creative autobiographies as models. Eager students can use biographies, encyclopedias and library reference tools to build a bank of information about a favorite author, illustrator, inventor or leader. Armed with plenty of factual information, students can then create "autobiographies" of Laura Ingalls Wilder, Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent

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Van Gogh or Charles Dickens. What might these historical figures have shared about their lives and work styles with young people, had they written and illustrated creative autobiographies for young readers?

• As the center of his books, Eric Carle uses simple creatures such as spiders, caterpillars or crickets, and with these he makes very important statements about friendship, love and the value of task commitment. Encourage students to select a similarly humble creature of the earth to become the messenger of a valuable lesson about life.

• Lois Ehlert and Eric Carle are two illustrators who make use of a form of collage, cut pieces of paper glued to a backing. Carle demonstrates this technique in both the book *The Art of Eric Carle* and the videocassette *Eric Carle: Picture Writer*. After students have examined the work of either illustrator, ask them to create collages on a subject of their choosing.

• Patricia Polacco's copious body of work is almost entirely based upon her own life experiences or those of her family. In *Meteor*, for example, she tells about a time in her childhood when a meteorite crashed onto her grandparents' front lawn. Encourage students to recall a colorful moment from their lives and visually recreate that special moment using any art medium, technique or style. ❖

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Successful Intelligence: How Practical and Creative Intelligence Determine Success in Life

Robert J. Sternberg. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996;
ISBN: 0-684-81410-2. 303 pp. (23.00 US)

Students who score high on achievement tests have everything it takes to be successful in the workplace — right? Not according to author Robert Sternberg, professor of Psychology and Education at Yale University. Sternberg asserts that these tests, which focus solely on analytical intelligence as a predictor of future job success, miss two critical aspects of successful intelligence: the creative and the practical. According to Sternberg, it is a combination of all three elements of intelligence which best predicts future job success. Yet in this country, it is the student with the highest scores on a variety of academic tests who is most likely to be admitted to an institution of higher learning.

Internally generated motivation is one aspect of practical intelligence that Sternberg highlights. Yet many bright youngsters in academic settings end up being externally motivated by pressure from their parents or the desire to "test well." When these students go to college they lack the ability to self-activate.

Many teachers, administrators and parents assume that students with high IQ scores will succeed with little effort, but this attitude leaves the highly analytical student vulnerable to future failures. Sternberg suggests that when we fail to encourage these thinkers to develop their practical and creative potential in favor of getting them into the best colleges, we may also be setting them up to fail miserably where it really counts — in the real world.

Sternberg asserts that successful intelligence is *goal directed* intelligence, in which the individual has the ability to achieve by using inherent strengths and compensating (with practical knowledge and creativity) for weaknesses. Critical to the development of successful intelligence, says the author, is an absence of **negative expectations** on the part of parents and teachers. Performing to expectations is rapidly becoming a key issue for the gifted student today. In classrooms where appropriate challenges are sparse and teachers assume that the brightest need the least attention, negative expectations are tacitly communicated. **Self-efficacy**, another element of successful intelligence noted by Sternberg, is often seen as troublesome in the traditional classroom when bright students challenge the course material, or worse, the teacher.

Robert Sternberg offers readers an inside look at standardized testing and what it really measures. His chapter on methods for improving practical and creative intelligence should be required reading for all parents and educators who work with the analytically gifted student. C.R. ❖

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Looking Inside Giftedness

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Focus: Looking Inside Giftedness

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Between the Lines

In earlier times, and for many years, education was mostly one-dimensional, focusing on academics and the straight delivery of information. School meant lessons and grades and rules — a skin-deep curriculum.

My own teacher training took place in the late 50s, about the time the concept of "individual differences" was just beginning to infiltrate educational theory. In class, it was impressed on me and my fellow undergraduate teacher wanabees that each child is a singular human being and must always be treated as such. Each individual learns differently, we were told, has different ability levels and a personality or character that belongs only to him or her. The naive undergraduate, I believed my teaching methods could reflect such principles. Enthralled with the idea that I could teach children as individuals and accept them for who they are and not just what they learn, I enrolled in any number of what seemed to me related courses, even one of the earliest university classes in gifted education. I reasoned that I could reach beyond the surface and really make a difference in children's lives.

I became an elementary teacher, but before I taught my first class I was handed a standard structured curriculum guide which required me to cover a fixed amount of content in the same way for every child. During that year, when I sought guidance in dealing with a child who was already at least three grade levels beyond her classmates in math concepts and reading, I was admonished by the principal. "She memorizes it," he informed me. Case closed. Confused, but reluctant to give up on the theory of individual differences I'd been so eager to try out, I lasted three years in the classroom before taking a leave of absence from education to raise my own children as the individuals—inside and out—I knew they truly were.

Years later, when I taught gifted education to teachers at the university level, I discovered *Growing Up Gifted* by Barbara Clark, in which she discusses fulfilling the needs of the total child: socially, emotionally, cognitively, physically, intuitively. I devoured the book and her concept, as did my teacher students, and I finally felt that I had come full circle. Moving from the model I'd encountered in my earliest years of teaching, based on that old, highly structured and inflexible view of education, the one which somehow loses sight of the child, what I found in Clark was an all-encompassing approach, focusing on the importance of integrating the many aspects of children, with a view to the total child. And we had reached this place through what we now simply call gifted education.

"Looking Inside Giftedness," as we are here, we search out the whole self within all children and endeavor to help them discover ways to actualize that self. First hand, I have had the opportunity to move from society's shallow view of schools and what education must be, along with what teachers and learners should look like, to a broader and deeper comprehension of the inside and outside of children and its impact in their lives and learning. It is our mission, as parents and teachers, to look past the facade into the interior lives of children and to go beyond the visible part of giftedness and understand what truly makes children who they are and what they can become. D.K. ❖

Focus

Gifted Children: The Heart of the Matter

Jim Delisle

As a long-ago teacher of gifted children, I made many mistakes. Armed with all manner of curriculum guides and problem solving models, I saw gifted children as human machines capable of lots of production. Projects flowed out of my resource room, as interested students devoured subjects ranging from astronomy to botany, algebra to Amelia Earhart. I was doing a good job, I thought, because my students were busy, engaged and learning.

But then Katy wanted to drop out of my gifted program. She couldn't come up with a project idea, and she didn't think she "deserved the privilege" (her words) of working in my class. Mike also chose not to return to a second year with me. He blamed his friends and the teasing he got from being a "cg" (cognitively gifted) kid — his classmates said his cg *really* stood for "chicken guts." Another program casualty was Benny, who said he used to feel smart before he entered my class, but now everyone else seemed smarter than he. The pressure to keep up was just too much for him; he didn't want to feel that he was the "bottom of the top" anymore.

It was then I realized that curriculum guides and fancy projects were not the essential elements of educating gifted children. The true essence lies someplace else, someplace deeper. It was only when I learned that the way to gifted children's minds is through their hearts that I became able to legitimately call myself their teacher. And that has made all the difference.

Gifted Children 101: Understanding Their Basics

When the field we now call *gifted education* began to get much attention in the early 1900's, it was because psychologists — not educators — began to get interested in young people whose intellectual and emotional functioning far surpassed those of their agemates. Today it seems that the only time a psychologist sees a gifted child is either to do a one-time intelligence test to "prove" giftedness or to pave the path for a formal diagnosis of ADHD by a physician!

Today, educators are both the main identifiers of gifted children and the primary professionals responsible for their intellectual well-being. And while I applaud the efforts made by teachers, most have a limited background in psychology, leaving them to use either common sense or past experiences as the bases on which to consider the social and emotional needs of gifted children. Sometimes, this is enough; often, it isn't.

What follows, then, are three elements of the psychological needs of gifted children. Gathered over the years by my observations as a teacher, counselor and parent, these basic needs must be considered if we are to address fully the special needs that exist within the minds, hearts and lives of our gifted children.

Essential Element #1: Giftedness is *someone you are*, not *something you do*.

Since the mid-1970s, the concept of giftedness has been shaped by

continued on next page

Jim Delisle *is a Professor at Kent State University in Ohio and a part-time 5th-6th grade enrichment teacher. His latest books are Growing Good Kids (with Deb Delisle) and The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook (with Judy Galbraith)*

Gifted Children

Continued

researchers who equate it with an activity you do (Renzulli, 1978) or a talent you possess (Gardner, 1983). In fact, a debate has arisen recently (Feldhusen, 1995) on whether the term gifted should be discarded completely, substituting it with the word "talented." Gifted behaviors have increasingly become the measure of choice to determine one's intellectual process.

Such talent-based conceptions of giftedness seldom address the psychological or social needs of gifted children. In fact, it is not uncommon to find a gifted student dropped from an honors class or resource room program because he or she does not produce adequate work. Such policies as this produce many psychological land mines for the children involved, as they may begin to believe their self-worth is measured against an external barometer of success or competency. When this occurs, a lowered regard for one's own uniqueness may result and a standard for perfectionistic work in all endeavors established:

I personally never felt like anything I did was good enough.

Angela, age 17

(Gifted kids) expect themselves to be perfect in all areas of study, therefore when something goes wrong, they undermine any prior success.

Sonja, age 13
(Galbraith and Delisle, 1996)

Parents and educators must help gifted children realize that the ability to understand complex ideas and emotions qualifies one as "gifted," whether or not they produce consistently at school-based tasks. The psychological construct of "giftedness" was never meant to be interpreted in relation to academic success. Isn't it time we returned to the idea of giftedness as a *personal trait* not a *standard of behavior*?

Essential Element #2: Gifted students want to *belong* more than they want to *be smart*.

As loathe as some gifted students may be to accept this reality, they are part of a species for whom socialization is both natural and important. We grow and learn, to a large degree, because of our associations with others; "no man is an island" is as true an expression for gifted students as it is for everyone else.

However, gifted students are often placed in a self-imposed either/or position that is very awkward: "Should I be gifted or just a regular kid?" The assumption, of course, is that you can't be both simultaneously:

We are expected to be pretty and popular and it is so hard to be intelligent and let it show in school.

Girl, age 14

How does a person avoid being ridiculed for having an advanced vocabulary or whatever? I mean, saying 'I can't help it, I'm gifted' isn't exactly a good comeback, is it?

Peter, age 12
(Galbraith and Delisle, 1996)

To help gifted students "fit in" while maintaining their very important sense of individuality, they must understand a few key points:

1) "Agemate" and "peer" are very different terms. A peer is someone who accepts, understands and enjoys you. An agemate merely shares your birth year.

2) Many gifted students' peers are younger or older than they are themselves — and that's okay.

3) The toughest time for gifted students in social relationships is also the toughest time for most *all* kids: the early adolescent years, from ages 11-16. After that (and especially in college), peer pressure to conform lessens considerably.

Given these realities, gifted children and teenagers can plan their actions — and reactions — accordingly. Figure 1 gives specific ways to approach an impending social relationship with class and confidence providing guidance in an area that is too often left to the painful method of trial and error.

Can you be gifted and socially well-adjusted, too? Most gifted kids are, but it's the exceptions (and the popular media) that have led us to believe otherwise.

Essential Element #3: Parents and educators must appreciate their <u>own</u> giftedness if they expect gifted children to do the same.

continued on page 6

12 Tips for Making and Keeping Friends

1. ***Reach out.*** *Don't always wait for someone else to make the first move. A simple "hi" and a smile go a long way. It may sound corny, but you'll be amazed at the response you'll receive when you extend a friendly greeting.*

2. ***Get involved.*** *Join clubs that interest you; take special classes inside and outside of school. Seek out neighborhood and community organizations and other opportunities to give service to others.*

3. ***Let people know that you're interested in them.*** *Don't just talk about yourself; ask questions about them and their interests. Make this a habit and you'll have mastered the art of conversation. It's amazing how many people haven't yet grasped this basic social skill.*

4. ***Be a good listener.*** *This means looking at people while they're talking to you and genuinely paying attention to what they're saying. (A long litany of "uh-huhs" is a dead giveaway that your mind is somewhere else.)*

5. ***Risk telling people about yourself.*** *When it feels right, let your interests and talents be known. For example, if you love science fiction and you'd like to know others who feel the same way, spread the word. If you're an expert on the history of science fiction, you might want to share your knowledge,* **BUT . . .**

6. ***Don't be a show-off.*** *Not everyone you meet will share your interests and abilities. (On the other hand, you shouldn't have to hide them—which you won't, once you find people who like and appreciate you.)*

7. ***Be honest.*** *Tell the truth about yourself and your convictions. When asked for your opinion, be sincere. Friends appreciate forthrightness in each other.* **BUT . . .**

8. ***When necessary, temper your honesty with diplomacy.*** *The truth doesn't have to hurt. It's better to say "Gee, your new haircut is interesting" than to exclaim "You actually paid money for THAT?" There are times when frankness is inappropriate and unnecessary.*

9. ***Don't just use your friends as sounding boards for your problems and complaints.*** *Include them in the good times, too.*

10. ***Do your share of the work.*** *That's right, work. Any relationship takes effort. Don't always depend on your friends to make the plans and carry the weight.*

11. ***Be accepting.*** *Not all of your friends have to think and act like you do. (Wouldn't it be boring if they did?)*

12. ***Learn to recognize the so-called friends you can do without.*** *Some gifted kids get so lonely that they put up with anyone—including friends who aren't really friends at all. Follow tips I-II and this shouldn't happen to you.*

Galbraith, J. & Delisle, J. (1996) The gifted kids survival guide. A teen handbook, p. 209. Minneapolis: Free Spirit. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1

Gifted Children

Continued

When I am presenting to adult audiences on the topic of social and emotional needs of gifted children, I get them comfortable before tossing in a zinger, "How many of *you* are gifted?" The most common responses are non-verbal: shuffling of feet, downcast eyes and an uncomfortable wiggling in their seats, fearing, no doubt, that I will call on them to personally "own up" to their unique gifts.

Educators and parents of gifted children often present themselves as poor role models with regard to the acceptance of personal giftedness. With comments like "you don't have to *be* gifted to *teach* the gifted" or "I don't know where she got her giftedness; I think it skipped my generation," we are sending a *very* mixed message: Even though I want you to be proud of your giftedness, I'm embarrassed to acknowledge my own.

There is abundant research showing a strong genetic predisposition for giftedness and, even if they are not well-schooled, parents of gifted children present themselves generally as an intelligent, curious, intense lot. Yet, too seldom are these adults willing to admit openly that giftedness has an impact on their lives, too, not just on those of the children in their care.

Blame this lack of openness on personal modesty or the cultural belief that you don't "blow your own horn." But whatever its source, it is sending a signal that the only *acceptable* gifted person is the *humble* one; the gifted individual whose pride in his or her own uniqueness must be closeted or hidden. Such self-effacing is but one short step away from denying that you are gifted at all.

It is vital that adults talk with gifted children about their own giftedness. They can mention the benefits of being able to understand concepts quickly, or the joy and pain of feeling emotions with an intensity not always appreciated by others. They can talk about their own struggles with personal identity and acceptance, and the self and societal expectations that often go along with growing up gifted. Also, they can help gifted kids recognize the distinction between being *better at* some things than others their age and being *better than* other people because of these gifts. "Better at" is nothing more than an acknowledgment of reality. "Better than" is a false statement of superiority that has no place in any individual's belief system.

The simple, honest, direct route is usually the best approach for explaining an issue that has many layers. Discussing giftedness with your children at home or your students at school begins with your own willingness to be open about your own gifts, whatever they may be.

The Essence of You(th)

Lily Tomlin wrote, "When I was growing up, I always wanted to be somebody, but I see now I should've been more specific."

Gifted children have the needs of safety, love, belonging and self-acceptance shared by all other people. These universal desires, when coupled with a unique gift to see the world from an enhanced perspective, take on importance earlier in life than one might expect.

As caring adults, whatever our personal or professional roles, we must give our children some essential elements through which they can live their lives with honesty, integrity and joy. As their lifeguides, we have more abilities to do so than we sometimes realize.

So.... Begin talking to your gifted children about these three essential elements. You'll end up in some very interesting places! ❖

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Focus

Life Lessons: The Social/Emotional in Gifted Children

George Betts

A number of years ago while working at Arvada West High School, I found myself in the dual role of teacher and learner. As the adult and professional, I taught social studies to teenagers and helped develop programs for gifted and talented students. As the learner, I found once again that, until positive self-esteem is developed and nurtured, the emotional and social needs of young people are usually more important than cognitive needs. These were lessons I'd learned before, beginning on my very first day of teaching, as well as lessons my students seemed intent on teaching me over and over again.

Cindy was the first high school student I met who was not achieving but seemed to be gifted. Although she had passed only three classes in a year and a half, she was obviously a very bright girl. Her vocabulary, her knowledge of many subjects and her desire to learn were all indicative of an agile and more than capable mind. She and I met through a dropout prevention program for sophomores, but she just wasn't like the other students in that program. Among some strong points, Cindy had two things that seemed to go against her in school: She was an individual who expressed total honesty but lacked tact, most often "telling it as it was" but in a way that offended others; and, despite a great love of learning, her particular approach to it was far from traditional. By the second or third week of school, she would have read all her textbooks and would then feel limited by the pace of the other students and the teachers. Cindy did not accept herself or others, and even when she did try to get along with her peers, she usually ended up frustrated and in trouble.

At Arvada West a stated goal was to meet the diversified cognitive, emotional and social needs of students. I felt that if I dealt with Cindy's emotional and social needs, as well as the cognitive, she could learn to accept and love herself and to be successful in school. Out of those considerations surfaced two critical questions: "Do we try to change the student?" or "Do we try to change the system?" After many discussions with other teachers and with the young student herself, it became evident that the system, not the student, should be changed. We understood that our only hope of keeping and helping this individual, whose intellect and personality were so complex and functioned so far outside what was the school norm, lay in accommodating her needs by changing what we offered. We implemented pretesting and compacting for Cindy, along with a program of in-depth studies and mentorships. When learning finally became meaningful for this girl, she began to soar, and not only academically. She grew emotionally and socially through a process based on the development of self-concept and self-esteem as well as on the development of appropriate social skills.

I'm happy to report that Cindy made it. She graduated late, but she graduated. As the result of working with and for her, the staff was open to identifying other gifted and talented students, including both those who were doing extremely well academically along with those who were underachieving, nonproducing or at risk of dropping out.

Always the learner myself, through the years my own life experiences, and those of Cindy and other students, have taught me to look beyond the acquisition of cognitive skills and concepts to the importance of the individuals involved. Attending to young people's self-esteem (evaluation of

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Life Lessons

Continued

the self) as well as to their self-concept (perception of the self) supports and enhances learning. In dealing with gifted students and their unique situations, consideration of the self is crucial. I see the self as always changing, floating, becoming, actualizing; as educators, keeping this in mind and trying to insure more positive experiences can only be a benefit to young people as they work at the life-long process of self-actualization, developing their own unique psychological characteristics and potentialities. To me, the formation of one's self is life's most important creative process.

Through my six years of working with identified gifted and talented students at Arvada West, Jolene Kercher, a mathematics teacher, and I developed the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM), originally designed for secondary students. Today, that model is used in grades K-12 throughout the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Singapore. Although many models in education originate at the university level, the ALM was developed in public schools by students, not professors, and was intended to meet multiple needs of gifted and talented students (Betts & Knapp, 1981).

While primarily cognitive in its focus, the ALM seeks to maintain a balance with more affective needs. Following are the goals of the model:

Students/Learners will:

-Develop more positive self-concepts.

-Comprehend their own giftedness in relationship to self and society.

-Develop the skills appropriate to interact effectively with peers, siblings, parents and other adults.

-Increase their knowledge in a variety of subject areas.

-Develop their thinking, decision making and problem-solving skills.

-Participate in activities selected to facilitate and integrate the cognitive, emotional and social development of the individual.

-Demonstrate responsibility for their own learning in and out of the school setting.

-Ultimately become responsible, creative, independent learners.

(Betts, 1985, p. 4)

The ALM is based on the premises that gifted students need to be together, to have time to develop their own curriculum with other gifted students, to go beyond the normal classroom curriculum, to have time for structured and nonstructured activities and to work independently, outside of school on in-depth studies with qualified mentors (Betts, 1985). Nothing was prescribed or required which did not aid students in developing a new approach to their learning.

When asked after graduation what had been most important to them in school and through this program, students most often responded, "being with other people who understand what it is like to be me." This has been a consistent theme since the beginning of the ALM, and no matter how the model is used in public or private schools, the development of the emotional and social aspects of the self are critical.

These days there are many references to the gifts and talents of each and every child, much talk of the growing belief that giftedness is practically universal. Over a professional lifetime I have worked with children of many ages and in many settings; I have taught them, and I have learned from them. One thing in particular I have learned is that all children are indeed talented, but there are a few who are gifted. The distinction is real. Determining giftedness isn't a matter of what individuals do or achieve; rather, it's who they are, which is traceable to the core of the self. The near-dropout Cindy's giftedness expressed itself even as her academic talents appeared few and far between. For me, she was the first obviously gifted student I encountered who was not achieving, but by no means was she the last. By looking beyond gifted behaviors, or the lack of them, and into a life and self, we can see that these children, the gifted ones, are different. We must understand this about them, and credit the fact that they know this about themselves as well. We must not forget that they're more sensitive, more intuitive, often have greater compassion for others and that they are apt to use their talents in surprising and/or unpredictable ways. In focusing on who they are rather than what they do, we can help them towards fulfilling the potential and promise of their gifts and their gifted lives. ❖

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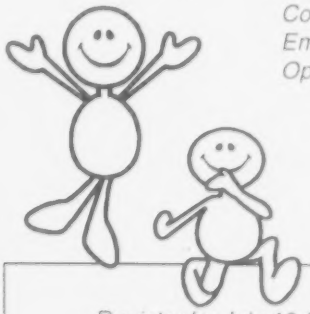

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Inside Information

It's understandable how we come to focus on the outside of things: outsides are more accessible, visible, audible, touchable. Easier. Just think how easy it is to see the outside of a child, all that curly or straight hair framing those brown or blue or green eyes, the missing teeth. With gifted kids, it's about impossible not to notice that enormously thick book being devoured by the pint-sized reader, the extravagant math problems answered by someone so small. It's difficult not to be astounded by the sophistication of one girl's intricately woven short story or the accomplished playing of another little boy on his half-size violin. How easy it is to see what they do and proceed from there, as if we understand, as if those are the starting points for everything else. The enormity, the extravagance, the sophistication and accomplishment of what these children do is nothing if that's where we start, or especially if that's all the farther we go, in assessing or characterizing or relating to them. Much better to start with their insides and work out. In fact, it's better to keep to that format all the way along.

As parents, at heart we know all this. Before and beyond anything else, these are our children, our babies, and we know them, inside and out, as no one else does or possibly can. Believing this, then maintaining trust in the belief, is the trick. Things out in the world are complicated and sometimes conspire to separate us from or make us forget what we know.

Let's say your daughter, among other precocious talents and challenges, read with comprehension when she was 3. You, as her parents, knew without anyone telling you that she was very smart. But just how smart, you felt compelled to know. So, because you wanted all the information and help you could get in raising this little human dynamo, before she began school you sought the expertise of a professional for testing. A week or two later, you find yourselves sitting in the psychologist's office for the debriefing session; waiting for confirmation of what you've known all along, you realize, has made you nervous. At last you're given the number, a big one, and the world rushes in, your life shifts on its axis. Now what, you want to know, what in the world do we do with this? What to do with her, becomes the question of paramount importance, what to do with this child who is now officially very different from the others? From then on, it seems, everyone is busy looking at the outside of her, concentrating on all the things she can do, which are, by comparison with her agemates, extravagantly amazing. But she's still your little girl, just the same as she's always been, inside and out, and *that's* what you must never let go of. No matter where the focus falls now, as it will more and more, on what she can do or make or remember or equate or synthesize, what remains most important is what's on the inside.

As parents, it's essential that we hold onto the insider knowledge, yours, mine and our children's, because sometime we may well need to consult a higher — no, deeper — authority. Teachers, principals, coaches, counselors, grandparents, other parents, all may want what's best for our children, indeed have their very best interests at heart, but it's crucial to keep in mind several things. However well-meaning their intentions for each individual child, these folks are most often operating based on what's best

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Laura Goodman *is a fiction writer, editor and mother of a gifted child, not necessarily in that order*

for a group of children, and, as things are, we can't expect it to be otherwise. Expediency dictates that they make assertions, choices and decisions based on as much information as they can gather, and invariably that will be the outside variety — information gleaned from classroom and schoolyard observation, counseling sessions, standardized test scores and so on. All good material in itself, potentially very helpful, but it's not everything, and not nearly enough.

Simply, it must not be forgotten that parents embody this primary source of understanding and knowledge. In either quantity or quality, there is nothing to match what parents know of their gifted children. Honoring and exercising that knowledge is both underrated and underutilized in child rearing today, particularly as concerns the gifted. It's high time that everyone involved in the lives of these children recognize the wisdom and power of this fundamental truth. ❖

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The Pursuit of Quality

Advanced Education Program in the Las Cruces Schools

Sandra Lowry
Sara Norris

Quality educational services have been a priority within the Las Cruces, New Mexico Public Schools for decades. The pursuit of quality prompted the Advanced Education Program (AEP) to conduct two separate surveys of gifted high school graduates and their parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the district's acceleration model gifted program. The information gained from the surveys enabled AEP to assess the quality of the services provided to gifted students over a 15-year period.

New Mexico is one of only a few states recognizing gifted children as exceptional students eligible for state mandated special education services. On a local level, a program for gifted students was first implemented through the creation of the Advanced Education Program in 1977. From 1977 through 1980, gifted students from several elementary schools were involved in a pilot project which offered enrichment classes for two half-days per week. At the end of that time, involved students, parents and teachers evaluated its effectiveness and determined that:

> *1) The enrichment activities were stimulating, but the students objected to being pulled out of their regular core classes.*
> *2) Teachers and parents felt that all students in the school district should have enrichment activities as part of their regular educational program.*
> *3) Even though the responding students saw the enrichment activities as valuable, they felt a need to move through the curriculum at a faster pace.*

The information gained from the three-year pilot project was coupled with an extensive review of the research on gifted education and the economic realities of state funding to design a district-wide program. An acceleration model was selected as most appropriate to meet the needs expressed in the pilot program evaluation while remaining economically feasible.

The New Mexico State Board of Education Standards for Excellence Compliance Manual governs gifted student services. AEP students have individual education plans (IEPs), annual reviews and the same due process procedures guaranteed to all special education students. Students are served in the most inclusive environment possible, primarily with honors and enriched classes which already exist within the regular education curriculum. Students are accorded the accommodations necessary to provide them with the most appropriate educational program possible. New Mexico House Bill 36 (HB36) created the added option of portfolio assessment for students who cannot be accurately evaluated on standardized measures of intelligence or achievement. The targeted population includes students who are culturally or linguistically different, are of low socioeconomic background or have a disability.

Some notable strengths of the Advanced Education Program are:

1) A facilitator is the key coordinator of each student's educational plan. The same facilitator often provides services to the student for a successive number of years, building a high level of confidence with parents, serving as a liaison between home and school and forming a close relationship

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Sandra Lowry and Sara Norris *are Advanced Education Program Facilitators for the Las Cruces Public School District, New Mexico. **Sandra** has taught home economics at the middle and high school levels and has worked with gifted students for five years. She is the mother of three gifted children. **Sara** has taught chemistry, physiology and English at the high school level and has worked with gifted students for eight years.*

with the student.

2) Students have the opportunity to accelerate in needed curriculum areas and receive instruction at a higher grade level with their academic peers in lieu of continuing with same age peers.

3) The gifted program is available to students K-12.

4) Students are not pulled out of classes on a regular basis to attend enrichment classes. Enrichment is offered to all students through the general education program.

5) The Advanced Education Program is one of the few programs in the nation striving to meet the needs of underachieving gifted students. At the high school level, facilitators conduct weekly academic support groups for these students and meet regularly with a consulting psychologist for support and assistance in meeting the unique needs of this small group. At the elementary and middle school levels, the facilitator works with the underachieving student on an individual basis and confers often with teachers and parents to assess the student's academic progress.

In the spring of 1992, all former Advanced Education Program graduates were surveyed to determine the merit of services provided. Parents of graduates were asked to participate in a separate parent version of the survey. The respondents were asked to rank on a Likert Scale the various components of AEP, as well as the positive and negative effects of acceleration in a variety of areas. A revised version of the 1992 survey was again conducted during the spring of 1996, to encompass AEP graduates between the years of 1992 and 1995. In 1995, a total of 246 surveys were mailed with 14 returned as nondeliverable. Sixty-five (28%) graduate responses and 72 (31%) parent responses were received. Since the parent responses closely paralleled students', only student survey results in all areas will be noted here.

STUDENT RESPONSES

Eighty-five percent of the students responding had received accelerated course work at some time during their public education. The curriculum areas in which acceleration most often occurred were mathematics and English. An increase in the number of students who had been accelerated since the 1992 survey was noted. One possible explanation for this increase could be that as AEP became better known to more teachers and parents, students were identified and placed in the program at an earlier age. Teachers were possibly more comfortable with assisting students in compacting curriculum and allowing them to move ahead at the students' own pace.

Students skipping a grade is often a concern for parents. We see that one continuing misconception about gifted students is that they are gifted in all curriculum areas. Our experience shows that most students truly excel in only one or two areas; therefore, their IEPs are carefully designed to accommodate areas of strength. The remainder of their work continues at grade level, supporting normal social and emotional development. All that said, however, it is important to note that approximately one-third of AEP students consumed the curriculum in all areas at such a rapid rate that they, in fact, did became full accelerants.

Age at high school graduation is an important consideration when looking at the long-term implications of acceleration. The majority of AEP graduates were still at the traditional age of 17 or 18 when they completed high school. It is a rarity for AEP students to choose early graduation even though they may have completed requirements by the end of their junior year. Most opt to take Advanced Placement courses or to explore elective areas of interest during their senior year. Only 6% of those responding graduated at age 16, compared to 10% in the 1992 survey.

Students were asked if placement in a gifted program resulted in any changes in attitude from their teachers, family or peers. The results were similar to those reported in the 1992 survey. Although about two-thirds of the students responding did not perceive their teachers as evaluating their school work any differently after being placed in AEP, the reality for many was that the *AEP label* meant teachers placed higher expectations upon them. The role of the facilitator is crucial in these instances — to provide teachers with as much information as possible to accurately assess student ability level in that specific discipline. A resounding *NO!* was the answer to the question "Did your family's academic expectation change when you entered AEP?" Most students indicated their parents already expected them to apply themselves. AEP student case histories reflect that many parents of gifted children realize that their child's intellectual ability is developing at a faster rate than normal and further encourage this development by providing enrichment within the home.

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Pursuit of Quality

Continued

A concern of some parents and teachers is the effect placement in AEP will have on a student's social development. As in the previous study, few negative social effects (20%) were noted and acceleration was viewed as extremely positive by 80% of the respondents. Gifted students, often by choice, seek out older peers because they feel they are more "on the same wave length." This is not to say there was not a period of adjustment experienced by some students. The students often had friends in both grade levels even if acceleration was in only one or two academic areas. The comments "viewed as a nerd" or "set apart" were noted by several respondents. Those feelings of isolation were precisely the reason for the establishment of an AEP support group network. In that support group, addressing the affective needs of the students is emphasized in an effort to minimize the period of adjustment.

Of the various AEP components, the one deemed most important to the student was the role of the *facilitator*. Ninety percent of the students ranked the facilitator's role in their educational process as "valuable" to "very valuable." One student summarized the role of his facilitator as "someone who was always around to make sure I stayed on a track for success." Likewise, *individual conferencing*, *course selection assistance* and *assistance with the college application process* were held in high regard by the students.

The benefits of attending AEP support groups continued to receive mixed reviews with 22% feeling it was of "some value" to "valuable." Since the gifted student population mirrors that of the general student population, some students have a greater need for a support group network than others. Therefore, it is not surprising that some students did not need the support group service. This finding further supports the importance of personalizing the student's Individual Educational Plan.

Results of both the 1992 and 1996 surveys indicate that the positive effects of a student's acceleration, both academically and socially, continue to far outweigh the negative effects. In fact, 95% of those responding viewed the academic effects of their acceleration as "valuable" to "very valuable." Many students consistently emphasized that acceleration afforded them the opportunity to take more challenging course work, which better prepared them for college. In retrospect, the students also realized and appreciated the constant consultations and individualized program reviews that were necessary for them to work to the upper limits of their abilities. These feelings were further substantiated by such student comments as "Being in the same classes with other accelerated students fosters an environment in which higher learning can be fun," and "It was an indispensable program—without AEP I would never have gotten as much out of my high school career." Both surveys indicate that the fear of some negative social ramifications is unfounded. Only 12% reported a negative association with acceleration, and it should be noted that this was a 15% drop from the 1992 survey. The respondents' views of the positive and negative effects of acceleration are shown in Figure 1.

How valuable was your acceleration as you look back at your educational program?

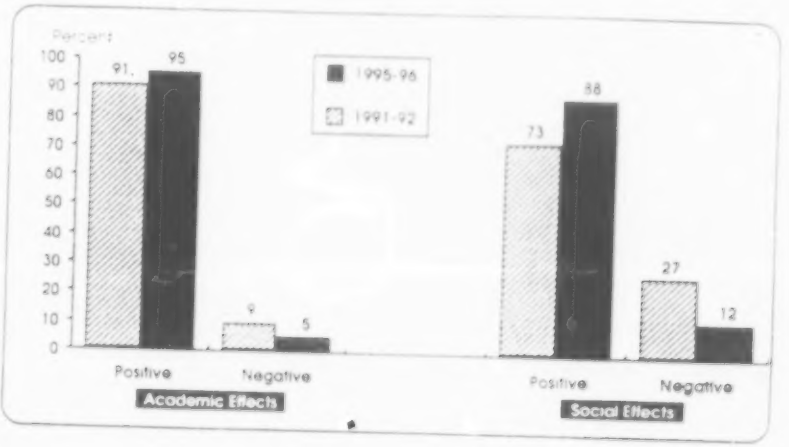

Figure 1

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Pursuit of Quality

Continued

The true measure of a successful educational program is the level of preparation with which it enables students to enter the next level of their educational process. As in the 1992 survey, 95% of students rated their educational preparedness as "valuable" to "very valuable." The respondents are currently attending and graduating from some of the country's finest universities and pursuing studies in a broad range of majors. In the 1996 survey, students were asked to compare their preparedness in specific subject areas to that of other freshmen with whom they were taking classes. See Figure 2.

Compared to other college freshmen how would you rank your high school course work in the following areas?

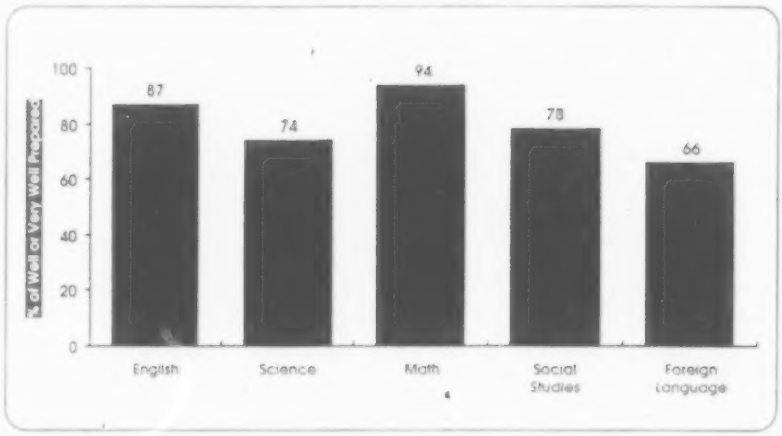


Figure 2

In both the Advanced Education Program High School Graduate Surveys, the responses from graduates and their parents were overwhelmingly positive in affirming AEP services offered to gifted students and the value of the facilitator. The information gained from both surveys, as well as from a comparison of information in the two, continues to be used as a basis for improving the quality of the Las Cruces Public Schools Advanced Education Program and the delivery of its services. Survey information, as well as general information about this trifocal acceleration model, is also shared with other school districts wishing to incorporate such a component into their own gifted services plan or to establish their own gifted program. Together, the two surveys are unique in that they track the growth and development of such a program over a 15-year period and reflect the effectiveness of its acceleration model for gifted education. ❖

Comments from Las Cruces Parents

I appreciated the program for parents. Overall, I will argue with anyone who thinks that because a student is gifted he or she also has skills to achieve without wise, caring intervention by professionals who know that gifted kids are different.

We very much appreciated the steady contact and encouragement of the facilitators throughout his middle and high school years. It gave all of us an immediate, knowledgeable contact who "knew the ropes" whenever we had a problem. Everyone needs someone like this in his corner.

The Las Cruces AEP program is one of the finest programs anywhere. The student's total needs are taken into consideration and every effort is made to meet their individual styles. Through the years I saw my son go from a shy boy to a confident young man.

ParentSpace

Special Edition

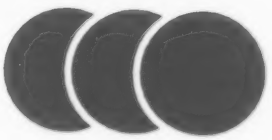
Polishing Stones

Robin Deister

We welcome guest parent writer, Robin Deister. Robin is a geological engineer and teacher and lives with her husband and gifted son high up in the Colorado Rockies. L.G.

As a parent of a gifted child, I find I am constantly challenged. When we found out our son was gifted, I cried. We had no experience in what to do with a kid of such high capabilities and potential. We wanted him to grow up happy with who he was and enjoy other people but wondered if this would be possible. The books I read did not paint a pretty picture, even in the best of situations. We live in a small rural community, infamous for its reputation of being the poorest mountain town in Colorado. There are not many specialized programs available. Also, I was raised to believe that parents send their child to school and the educators know what to do. Intuitively, I doubted this. I wondered if the teachers in this small town could possibly know what to do with a child who occurs once among 10,000 children. Calling upon my geological engineering background, I came up with an analogy to use in coping with both our son's differences and differences in others. I called it The Polishing Stone Theory.

The theory's underlying premise is that you have stones for everything you will do in your entire life. This means you receive stones for potty training, learning how to add, riding a bike or being a friend. Large and small, everything. Your goal in life is to polish these stones.



The theory has a number of rules to remember. **The first rule** is that your stones will always be there. Since the stones are always there and since there is no magical age for starting to polish a stone, you determine how much time you spend on a given stone. You may start to polish one and find you don't like it or that others look more interesting right then, and that's okay. The important thing is that you tried that stone; you can always come back to it in the future. Someone else may not start polishing that particular one till much later in life and work on it night and day, ending up at some point with a stone more polished than the person who started polishing early but had set that one aside. It doesn't matter; the process is dynamic.

The second rule is that to start, you may get a stone that's a little more polished than another. If you get one of these, it doesn't mean yours is better than someone else's whose beginning stone is less glossy, only that you have a head start on one single stone. Everyone has the same number and kind of stones. The person with a less-polished stone of one kind may have several others of another kind that are much more polished. **The third rule** holds that some stones are made out of different materials and polish differently. A stone made of granite is harder to polish than one made of clay. Even though granite is more difficult to work with, it is so beautiful when finished that it's used to decorate the fronts of buildings; the results are well worth the effort.

The fourth rule states that no stone can ever be perfectly polished. **The fifth rule** has it that the polish on a stone depends only on the effort, not a grade. Even if you put a grade on a stone, you will just polish it off the

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Polishing Stones

Continued

next time you work on that stone. Also remember that a stone may oxidize if you leave it for a while, with some rust building up on the outside surface. If so, it may require a little extra effort to remove that rust when you pick it up to work on it again.

Considering this analogy has helped our family in several different ways. Over the years, it has helped my son put individual differences into perspective, given him the freedom to try new things with the understanding that he can polish a stone a little now and come back to it later if he wants. It has helped him accept that some things come easily to him, while others don't. To a point, it has helped with his perfectionistic tendencies; he understands the concept and will readily apply it to himself or others when the issue is not pressing. However, he's still working to use it when he hasn't met his own expectations. I guess he's still polishing that stone. ❖

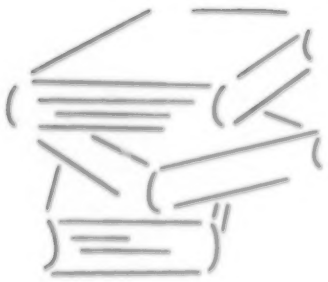
Book Review

Talent Development: Theory and Practice.
Edited by Jan B. Hansen and Steven M. Hoover. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1994.

Jerry Flack

Talent Development: Theory and Practice pays homage to John F. Feldhusen for his many contributions to the recognition and identification of and education for gifted and talented youths. The genesis of the book was a 1989 symposium honoring the 10th anniversary founding of the Gifted Education Resources Institute (GERI) at Purdue University. The 18 contributing authors are associated faculty and former doctoral students of Dr. Feldhusen. The common threads which weave together their various perspectives and visions of talent development are their intellectual and philosophical bonds to John Feldhusen. Although the authors represent varying philosophical positions with respect to talent development and write from different experiences and disciplines, the separate writings which form the text blend together remarkably well, forming a highly readable and informative whole.

The book is divided into three broad areas: the identification and selection of talented students, curriculum development to meet the unique education needs of talented youths and motivation and affect development as they relate to gifted and talented populations.



Kathyrn Linden and Steven Hoover provide a solid introduction to psychometric tools utilized in the talent identification process and critical considerations for their usage. Farthi Jarwan and William Asher discuss the merits and problems associated with five basic methods used in the talent identification. Michael Sayler provides a comprehensive overview of early college entrance as one viable acceleration alternative for meeting the needs of talented youths. His description of the TAMS model program for acceleration at North Texas State University nicely rounds out the first section of the text.

In the second section, science, mathematics and language arts learning experiences receive special attention, as do the processes of designing integrated, thematic units that cross and utilize many disciplines. Steven Hoover presents an enticing four-component model to describe the relationship between content and learner in elementary science classrooms. He also provides an informative set of characteristics and needs of gifted science students and outlines worthy goals for elementary science programs serving talented youths. All of the authors who address curriculum for talent development provide highly useful models and examples of exemplary teaching strategies. Jan Hansen provides a very thorough discussion of the unique language learning traits and concomitant academic needs of verbally gifted children. Her discussion of how teachers and parents can address all of the classic areas of the language arts — listening, speaking, reading and writing — are supplemented with practical suggestions for teaching. James R. Hersberger and Grayson H. Wheatley describe the use of computers in developing higher level thinking skills with mathematically gifted upper elementary school students, and Wheatley uses a second chapter to investigate the role of imagery in mathematics learning of gifted students. He shares fascinating research and theory with respect to the inappropriate identification and treatment of spatially gifted youths in mathematics.

Jerry Flack, *President's Teaching Scholar and Professor of Gifted Education at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is the author of Inventing, Inventions, and Inventors and Lives of Promise.*

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Ann Robinson and Penny Britton Kolloff accentuate the secondary gifted learner in their chapter describing the merit and process of constructing thematic units. Robinson and Kolloff present excellent rubrics for curriculum design based upon such broad and inclusive themes as "change," "survival" and "quality." A complete unit on the theme of problem solving in mathematics, chemistry, physics, literature and the humanities is presented. Resources and lesson plans designed for honors students in the Indiana Governor's Scholars Academy are shared.

The concluding chapters of the text focus upon issues of affect in the education of gifted and talented youths. Pamela R. Clinkenbeard pays particular attention to the body of literature which points to suggestions for effectively dealing with underachievement among talent populations. Nina Buchanan and Sandra Sparling use case studies of two underachieving gifted elementary students, Florita and Dennis, and demonstrate how positive intervention may be realized through the use of attribution theory. Dorothy Kennedy gives a detailed discussion of a compelling case study of a 5th-grade classroom and what occurred in classroom dynamics when identified gifted children were present in the classroom and when they were removed from that environment to participate in a part-time, pullout gifted program. One of the most fascinating aspects of her case study is the dominant role played by a very highly gifted youngster. Miraca Gross examines the nature and needs of profoundly gifted students, describing particular developmental differences in the acquisition of reading, memory, intuitive leaps, and sense of humor. Both school personnel and parents will find especially valuable the guiding principles Kevin Kelly outlines in his chapter on career planning and counseling.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska, one of John Feldhusen's closest allies in the field of gifted education for at least two decades, sums ups and discusses the common threads that bind together the thinking explored in the text. The perception of learning as an ongoing life span issue, the importance of affect in the education of talented youths and the critical issue of nurturing talent regardless of the specific talent domain are among these common themes. She concludes with a special tribute to Dr. Feldhusen's relentless pursuit of excellence for himself and others. She particularly salutes his professional lifetime commitment to assist and champion graduate students, especially women and minorities, who might not have reached their fullest potential except for his support, encouragement and challenge.

The contributions made by John Feldhusen and GERI are impressive indeed. Approximately 5,000 teachers, counselors and administrators from the United States and no less than 25 countries have enrolled in at least one GERI course. Feldhusen has directed 200,000 contact hours of graduate-level instruction. Thousands of individuals have made use of the vast professional library and Shared Information Services established by Feldhusen at GERI. The authors of this volume serve well his visions, his contributions to education and his unfailing commitment to the development of the myriad talents of young people everywhere. ❖

When Children Come Home: the Process of Deschooling

Kathleen Schon

The decision to homeschool did not come easy for us but once decided was embraced with passion and determination. We prepared ourselves carefully. We read books by Holt and Colfax and Gutterson. We talked to people with experience and attended seminars on homeschooling, and we studied the various approaches to homeschooling from the structured school-at-home model to unschooling. We finally settled on a basic unschooling plan with slight modifications, a plan that would allow our 11-year-old daughter, Christina, to find her own path and to reclaim the gifts and talents that had been submerged along the way. As it turned out, we were well prepared for everything except one crucial factor: deschooling.

Deschooling is the adjustment period that occurs for every child who has ever attended a school, public or private, regardless of the quality, quantity or category of that school. This is a very sensitive and difficult time for new homeschoolers. After so many years of being told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, where to do it, what to do it with, how to sit to do it, and what not to do when doing it or waiting to do it, children usually have no idea how to behave. Sometimes that results in misbehavior or acting out because the anchor that was tied around them for so long is now missing and they just don't know how to cope. It is during the deschooling process that coping mechanisms and self-reliance are forged.

For adults, deschooling is almost as big an adjustment as becoming a parent and must be experienced to be fully understood. Every child is different, and there's little that can truly prepare a parent for what that child will experience. The watch words here are time and patience. The amount of time varies from child to child and situation to situation, but the general rule of thumb says, the longer the child was in school, the longer the period of adjustment at home. As for the amount of patience required, well, that all depends, too, but summoning as much extra patience as possible is probably the best plan.

Christina was excited about being a homeschooler; it had been her idea in the first place. In July, she asked when we could start, and I told her whenever she wanted. "Now?" she asked. Well, why not? When I asked what she had in mind, she replied, "Home Economics." So we started with that night's dinner preparations, peeling potatoes, cutting broccoli, washing the chicken... "Wash the chicken? You mean touch it? Eww!" Suddenly, Home Economics wasn't much fun and my budding Julia Child disappeared until time to eat. The next day she asked if we had to start school right away after all. No, I told her, we didn't.

We began officially in August after registering with the state. Christina hadn't expressed an interest in doing anything else after the chicken episode, but I wasn't worried. I just knew that once we started "for real" everything would be fine. After all, Christina wanted this, had begged for it in fact, so surely she'd buckle down and find her path, if not right away, then soon. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Often families choose a method of home education and use the deschooling period, which should not be confused with unschooling, to search for and amass ideas and materials for when they "officially" begin. Others use this time of their children's unwinding to find or experiment with

***Kathleen Schon**, who resides in Tennessee, is a freelance writer and homeschooling parent of a gifted child.*

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Deschooling

Continued

what will eventually become their educational plan. It's essential to remember that *every* child, regardless of the chosen style of homeschooling, will experience deschooling to some degree. Some children are compliant, others are not, and reactions can range from wistfully staring out the living room window for no apparent reason to full-blown tantrums or adamant refusals to do anything that remotely resembles school work.

We knew unschooling was for us, embracing the belief in autodidactics in which a child will learn everything she needs without being told what or how to study. Left to her own devices, we trusted that Christina's natural desire to learn would blossom and grow without outside interference. One example for us was a very gifted boy we knew who, when deschooling, spent an entire year in his room building with Legos; eventually, he came out the other side a happy and self-motivated learner. But even with firsthand proof and countless assurances, to accept the premises of either deschooling or unschooling requires a great leap of faith.

During Christina's deschooling, we became convinced that our daughter would be the first child ever for whom unschooling simply would not work. For over a year she did what appeared to be absolutely nothing, or at least nothing academic. She followed me around all day, giving new meaning and depth to the term, "clinging vine." If I was on the phone, she was nearby listening to me. If I was at the computer, she was there watching me. If I went outside, she went with me. If I took a shower, she waited in the adjoining bedroom until I was done. It was almost like having a newborn and, in a sense, that's exactly what she was: new born to herself. She turned me into that missing anchor and held on for dear life. Her typical extremes of emotion and sensitivity were exacerbated during this time. Casual comments at the dinner table resulted in floods of tears and hasty retreats to her room, leaving her father and me baffled, wondering what we'd said. Bouts of sullenness and periods of daydreaming and inactivity were also common.

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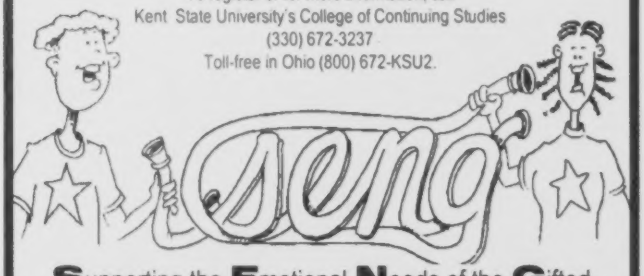

Supporting the **E**motional **N**eeds of the **G**ifted

Deschooling

Continued

Finally, and in desperation, I told her that she must find *something* to do. I didn't care what it was, but it had to be something *she* found interesting. "But how do I find out what I'm interested in?" she wailed. She had submerged herself so deeply that she honestly didn't know, nor did she know how to find out. She wanted me to tell her what to do and I was determined not to do that. Oh, it would have been easy to say, "Go read about dinosaurs," knowing that to be one of her many interests. But the result would have been yet another going-nowhere conversation with the probable reply of "I don't want to." Or, she might have acquiesced easily enough only to return five minutes later with, "I did it. Now what?"

The desire to learn ultimately must come from within the child. This can be a difficult and painful process for previously schooled youngsters who were never given much choice about learning. They don't know how to trust themselves, and this they must learn on their own. There is no other way. Once learned, though, the results are glorious, and this is what happens during deschooling.

I didn't tell Christina what to do, but I did tell her where she might start looking: our home library. Reluctantly, she went up the stairs and began looking through books. Some time later she came back down clutching a craft book, her finger marking the place. She brought it to me and said, "I want to do that," pointing to a picture of a sock doll. Well, it wasn't quite what I'd envisioned but it was of her own finding and since she'd always been very artistic it seemed that doing something with her hands might be the way to get her going. I gave her free rein in the sewing room and access to all my materials, I showed her a few basic stitches and left her alone. Much to my amazement, she stayed in her room for hours; the project totally enthralled her. After that first sock doll was completed, she went on to make more. She made sock doll families and sock doll friends, sock dolls in all sizes, shapes and colors, using everything from infant socks to her dad's size 13s. She made clothes for them and gave them painted faces.

Several months went by at "Sock Doll Central," and then I began to worry anew that she'd never emerge from this part of the phase either. Any attempt to redirect her failed and, as often as not, resulted in a setback. Suggestions or questions from me or her father sounded to her like criticism and made her doubt herself all over again. She'd shut down and refuse to do anything, including adding to her growing sock doll city. She'd revert to the days of following me around, lapse back into the heavy emotions and tears. We were all in pain. Fortunately, we learned our lesson early and knew to keep our mouths shut. In any event, there was no need to worry. What she was doing was perfectly natural — regaining confidence in herself. As soon as her confidence level reached the point where she, and not I, was comfortable, she gave up the sock doll project and picked up a book. It was one of the "Star Trek" series and opened up a new world for her. First she read all the *Star Trek* books and then all the *Star Wars* books. Okay, so it wasn't great literature, but it didn't matter. She was interested in things again. She started talking about astronomy and space travel and science fiction.

But the real turning point came one evening on the way home from her karate class. It was a beautiful, clear night and the moon was full. Christina didn't say a word during the short drive, but we were used to her silences by then and thought nothing of it. When we got home she said, "See you later," and disappeared into her room. A few hours later she emerged with 13 handwritten pages of a science fiction story she'd thought of on the ride home. Later she said, "I was staring at that beautiful, wonderful moon and I started thinking, gee, what if. . ." After that night, she never went anywhere without a notebook to write in and a book to read. She created alien flora and fauna, invented a civilization and formulated a language for her imaginary planet. She must have been learning *something* during those long months of deschooling.

Before long, she started sculpting the creatures that inhabited her story. This was truly joyful to watch. Working with clay and turning shapeless lumps into perfectly accurate representations of animals had been something she excelled at when she was 3 but that had been buried by age 8. To see this gift coming back was nothing less than miraculous, and it was then I knew for sure that we were going to make it.

Was our deschooling experience typical? Inasmuch as we went through some very rough times, yes, but other than that, no. In truth, there is no "typical" experience because all children are unique and will always bring themselves to the process. And it's important to keep in mind that what I'm calling a "very rough time" isn't the same as someone else's very rough time. In fact, from the outside, it might not have looked like

- continued on next page

Deschooling

Continued

a very rough time at all. Our rough times were emotional in nature, raw feelings, easy tears, tantrums, heightened sensitivity beyond belief, but the worst of all was the clinginess, her absolute refusal to be separated from me. Christina was unhappy, I was unhappy, and we were both exhausted during those months. But some might say that we got off easy compared to their experiences. I've known children who act out their frustration in totally unacceptable ways. They lie, cheat, steal, sometimes worse, but what they are really doing is pushing their boundaries, redefining who they are and where their place is in their new homeschooling environment. They're trying to find out what's changed and what's the same. And, implicitly, they're trusting their parents to love them, to be there and to guide them throughout all of it, but not to make their choices for them. It's no easy task for anyone involved.

The amount of time deschooling takes is the amount of time it takes. This may sound flip but it's not meant to be. There are no predictable numbers on the timeline of deschooling. For us it was about 18 months. Some children deschool in much less time, some take longer. One 7-year-old boy I know took only three months to adjust, the 9-year-old daughter of a friend took over two years. Christina is now 14 and well past her deschooling period. She's achieved a serenity I could not imagine at her age, and she's a lot of fun to have around. She's an active participant in her own education. Learning goes on at all times and in all places, and we are all involved. We have ongoing discussions about history and politics, ethics and morals, economics and agriculture, art and music. She taught herself to play the recorder and then the flute. She's writing not just one, but seven different novel-length stories. She draws, paints, sculpts and has a notebook filled with her own fashion designs. Even math, a subject she has no love for, is approached with equanimity. She reads voraciously: mysteries, poetry, humor, an occasional classic and, of course, science fiction. After all, these are *her* choices...and she knows it. ❖

For readings on homeschooling, see p.19 in the Winter, 1997 issue of Understanding Our Gifted.

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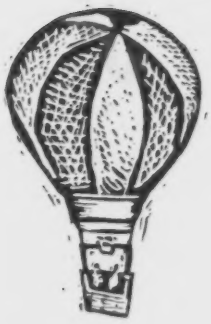
Above & Beyond

Susan Winebrenner

Easier Access to the Interior World of Gifted Youngsters

When my own kids were young, I had to dig deep to find resources to help me understand what was going on inside their heads and hearts. Dr. Spock didn't cover much about such things — gifted children and their social and emotional situations. I often had to rely on pleas and messages passed, via a friend, between myself and her clinical psychologist sister-in-law! Parents of my generation relied a lot on instinct and common sense, indisputably admirable and worthwhile tools, but helpful only so far in some of the life events that challenged us concerning gifted children.

Things have certainly changed. There is now an almost overwhelming proliferation of "help" materials so varied and easily available that parents really interested in getting the big picture of their gifted children might be tempted to take a few years off from life to simply read all they can get their hands on. This abundance of information can be daunting to those of us with limited amounts of reading time.



Good news! *The Gifted Kids Survival Guide: A Teen Handbook* by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle (1996) has just been revised and re-released, and it's a gold mine of information that can make parenting and teaching gifted youngsters much easier and less stressful. Although the target audience is gifted teens, the comprehensive content and the guidelines offered make sense with gifted kids of all ages. This book can help adults and children work together to understand and accept the emotions, frustrations and recurring problems, a few of which are touched on below, that typically accompany this condition we call "giftedness."

It's no secret that it's stressful to be identified as gifted. Some parents of gifted kids express the wish that their child could just "be normal." People of all ages say and do things that create defensive feelings on the part of gifted youngsters. Those who misunderstand the legitimacy of having exceptional ability and needing educational modifications may even revive the age-old spine-tingling charge of elitism. In the revised *Survival Guide*, the authors provide specific suggestions for dealing with people's negative feelings about giftedness in ways that validate gifted individuals' rights to reveal themselves as they really are.

Gifted kids have high expectations for themselves and also perceive them from others. Teachers and parents may seem disappointed if perfect grades are not maintained, perhaps misunderstanding that if students are really learning at their challenge level, high grades are more likely to be achieved at the end of a learning curve than at its beginning

Expectations from others and self that one should always be perfect create a condition called "paralyzed perfectionism." Perfectionistic self-talk and behaviors interfere with motivation and learning. Adults frequently don't recognize many of the behaviors associated with this condition because their youngster may appear to be totally uninterested in completion of high quality work, let alone the production of a perfect product. The

***Susan Winebrenner**, from Michigan, presents workshops on a variety of topics, but her first love is teaching gifted children. She is the author of Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom and Teaching Gifted Kids with Learning Disabilities in the Regular Classroom.*

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Easier Access

Continued

authors point out that some behaviors that may indicate the presence of paralyzed perfectionism include: procrastination, blaming others for one's inability to get a job done, depression, disorganization, eating disorders, headaches and other recurring physical symptoms and suggest that adults and gifted learners give themselves permission to fail at not being perfect. True academic growth is rarely possible if such permission is not perceived. The resolution to this dilemma lies in the ability to know the difference between paralyzed perfectionism and the pursuit of excellence.

The most common frustration parents express to me is that they don't know how to approach their child's teachers to advocate for what is needed in the classroom. Very often, schoolwork isn't challenging, and the longer that situation continues, the more dedicated gifted kids may become to not having to do more than is absolutely necessary to get high, or even passing, grades. The second most often expressed frustration is how to deal with sons or daughters who seem content with less-than-challenging goals. Galbraith and Delisle emphasize the establishment of realistic goals and dialogue with teachers to ask them to provide more challenging learning opportunities.

For gifted youngsters, it's hard to find friends who understand and accept them just as they are. Unfortunately, many gifted children waste lots of energy and time trying to hide their abilities, and with them their real selves, so they can appear more attractive to age peers. People sometimes assume gifted kids lack social skills because they appear to have trouble getting along with others their age. Sections of this book describe concrete strategies for making and keeping friends.

The *Survival Guide* covers a host of other topics as well, among them: helping gifted young people navigate their often extreme sensitivities concerning world affairs, justice and ethics; gender issues; the problem of multipotentiality (too many interests and strengths to deal with easily) in considering possible careers; college selection; and the perennial stickler of parent-child communication. The book's credibility is enhanced by numerous testimonials written by gifted kids describing their experiences in personal terms that will likely hit home with many kids who read it.

Galbraith and Delisle conclude, "It's okay to stay a kid for a few more years. One of the bonuses of adolescence is that it buys you time to experiment, explore, and experience a variety of possibilities and choices." (p. 253) And I would add, to understand and appreciate the interior world of giftedness. ❖

References

Galbraith, J. and Delisle, J. (1996). The gifted kids survival guide: A teen handbook. Minneapolis: Free Spirit.

Surfing the Net

Sandra Berger

Have you read the national report *Pursuing Excellence: Initial Findings from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study* (U. S. Department of Education, 1996), often referred to as the TIMSS study? If not, the executive summary and full report are online at *http://www.ed.gov/NCES/TIMSS*. *Pursuing Excellence* is a synthesis of initial findings from TIMSS on 8th grade mathematics and science education, providing a comparative picture of education in the United States and the world. The report made clear that while U.S. students are above average in science, they continue to be below average in mathematics. Reading the report, I decided that this column would focus on mathematics. So launch your browser and let's surf the Internet.

URL: *http://forum.swarthmore.edu/* is the home of The Math Forum, one of the primary sites for mathematics on the Internet. The Internet has many math resources and sites, but this one is special, a virtual center for math education and technology on the Internet. The content is challenging, taking advantage of the new technologies, and The Math Forum understands the real meaning of good teaching and learning. Click on the home page logo to obtain membership information.

The Math Forum offers interesting information for teachers, students, parents and other individuals, categorized in user-friendly styles and formats. Two versions of the home page are offered: graphics and text-only. Click on "Math Resources by Subject" or the "Quick Reference Sheet" to get an overview. The home page includes a search engine you can use to search for specific information. The search engine screen contains a box for entering terms. Try typing "math puzzles," "math olympiad" or "computer games."

Do you know someone who likes to think about mathematical patterns? There's a great game at the URL *http://www.geom.umn.edu/~addington/number_bracelets/number_bracelets.html*. I found it by sending the Math Forum search engine to look for puzzles. I also visited the home page for The International Mathematics Olympiad. The Olympiad culminates for the year in May 1997, and throughout the year it offers problems and solutions.

The Math Forum has assembled some amazing resources and links. There's even an electric origami shop with kaleidoscopes. "Key issues," one of the Math Forum menu choices, discusses some mathematics concerns, such as equity and access for women, minorities and people with disabilities.

Another interesting home page feature is hidden within the Math Forum logo. When you place your cursor over one of the links on the page, an image describing the contents of the link alternates with the logo.

One of the most popular features has been Ask Dr. Math. Anyone can submit a K-12 math question by sending e-mail to *dr.math@forum.swarthmore.edu*. Dr. Math does not do homework. Individuals submitting questions state what they know about specific problems and where they are stuck, and Dr. Math helps by explaining a process or providing other information to use to get "unstuck." Ask Dr. Math is at *http://forum.swarthmore.edu/dr.math/*. The e-mail address is the same as above.

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Sandra Berger *is the Information Specialist for Gifted Education at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education in Reston, Virginia. She is the author of College Planning for Gifted Students.*

Surfing the Net

Continued

The Math Forum is a smorgasboard of one interesting choice after another. Visit when you have lots of time. I followed a couple of links and got hooked for the afternoon!

The Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, is at *http://www.enc.org/*. Learn how the ENC serves the needs of mathematics educators by checking out *The National Network of Eisenhower Regional Consortia and National Clearinghouse 1997 Final Report* at *http://www.enc.org/about/index.htm*.

According to the home page, the Consortia and Clearinghouse help states develop and implement curriculum frameworks, performance standards and assessments that hold promise for systemic reform in mathematics and science education. The reference desk will help with locating K-12 teaching resources for use in your classroom or with your child(ren), identifying exemplary K-12 programs in math and science and targeting federally funded efforts to support math and science teaching. You can also get responses to K-12 math or science education related questions via e-mail as well as postal mail and telephone. The e-mail address is *library@enc.org*; toll-free phone is 800-621-5785. The Resource Center shares space with and provides access to the ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education (ERIC/CSMEE), located online at *http://www.ericse.org/*.

Among ENC's many interesting resources is the Digital Dozen, a collection of activities and events that changes monthly. The Digital Dozen is archived so you can see resources that have previously appeared. The online newsletter provides stories about innovative teachers who are charting new territory in education. You will also find information on how to obtain free materials and CD-ROMs. There are lots of resources, including curricula, lessons and activities that you can use to integrate the Internet into your classroom or home units. The ENC site is easy to use, and it doesn't have a lot of graphics that seem to take forever to load.

URL: *http://www.usa2100.org/index.html* is the home page of a learning and teaching center called USA2100. Look for a link called K-12 Resources on the left side of the home page. Open it to get to mathematics. USA2100 categorizes math resources by grade level, convenient for those who know the grade level needed. A look at the resources categorized under grades 7 and 8 reveals that the USA 2100 audience includes gifted students. For example, one of the grade 7/8 math resources is Ask Dr. Math whose links include "advanced investigations, geometry, logarithms, math history and Pi."

When you use USA 2100 to link to subject area resources, the URLs for the links do not appear on your screen. You can't "bookmark" them because the location URL (probably at the top of your screen) is *www.usa2100.org*. (There are technical reasons for this, but an explanation is beyond the scope of this column.) So if you want to get back to a particular math site, how will you find it without going through USA 2100? That's important because sites come and go, and although it's unlikely, USA 2100 might disappear just when you need the links and resources. Be sure to pursue a particular link until you find the URL, then write it down, type it into the location bar, go there and bookmark it. If you are using a browser like Netscape, another way to get the URL is by pulling down the "view" menu at the top of your screen and looking at "document info." Scroll down the document info, and you will eventually find the URL for the link.

Mega-Mathematics!, the last stop on our surfing trip, is a project of the Computer Research and Applications Group at Los Alamos National Laboratory *http://www.c3.lanl.gov/mega-math/*. Users are given a choice between the image map and a menu. I like the menu because image maps take a long time to load and the menu presents an orderly list of topics. Each topic provides a menu in the form of a geometic image called the Big Picture that allows users to obtain further information on the topic. The Big Picture image includes the following choices: activities, vocabulary, background info, big ideas and key concepts, prep and materials, evaluation, for further study and a link to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) where you will find an explanation of how the topic integrates with NCTM standards. The image is the same on each page or topic, making it easy to get around.

For example, one of the topics involves the use of crayons and is a great way to interest young children in mathematics. The chal-

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Surfing the Net

Continued

lenge for the student is to determine how many different colors you need if you want to color some maps so that countries sharing a boundary line are colored differently. A variety of maps, ranging from simple to complex, have been provided. The Big Picture provides an interesting way in which map coloring integrates with the NCTM standards. According to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the core of doing mathematics includes Mathematics as Problem Solving, Mathematics as Communication, Mathematics as Reasoning and Mathematical Connections. According to Mega-Math, these concepts are inherent in map coloring activities. The discussion and some questions can be found at *http://www.c3.lanl.gov/mega-math/workbk/map/mpnctm.html*.

That ends this surfing expedition. In the next issue, we will focus on another academic subject. Meanwhile, wave if you see me surfing! ❖

sberger@inet.ed.gov

The ideas expressed in this article are the author's, and do not necessarily represent the views of the CEC or ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.

Watch for Open Space Communications Web Site on the Internet!
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I was delighted to see "The Summer Boy," Laura Goodman's insightful Fall, '96 ParentSpace column. I read it to my husband with tears streaming down my face, while our own boy wonder leaped about in the living room, and have since quoted it to friends and family. Thank you for printing this moving and intelligent piece.

We are homeschoolers who believe wholeheartedly that by asking ourselves the larger, more important question "how do we best live our lives," we will find answers to questions of how to insure the best education for our gifted children.

Recently my husband and I were invited to speak on our chosen lifestyle. We did so by offering our Top 10 List of Reasons for Homeschooling, which remind me of points raised in the story of "The Summer Boy." 10) Everyday Convenience, 9) Opportunity to Develop Self-Discipline, 8) Sufficient Down-Time, 7) Intrinsic Motivation, 6) Real-life Socialization, 5) Individualized Education, 4) Freedom of Expression, 3) Ownership of Experience, 2) Family Closeness. The #1 reason is: The Raising of Whole People, who view living and learning as one and the same thing.

Francine Reichman
New Rochelle, NY

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Life Lines

Original humor from Thomas, age 6, followed by a recent gem from his brother Matt, age 4.

Q: Do you know who wins the Nobel Prize?
A: People with no doorbells!

In gleeful anticipation of the TV being turned on for a viewing of Charlotte's Web, the two little boys were running laps around the kitchen and family room. As the opening credits rolled, Matt swooped towards his mom, paused to tell her, with a twinkle in his eye, "Charlotte has a new web...site!"

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The Life of a Perfectionist

Michael Lowe

The life of a perfectionist is filled with strife,
I fear:
with never a time of respite.

Every action is followed,
catalogued,
judged by yourself — the most ruthless judge of all.

Consider, for example, the perfectionist at a race,
striving for the lead, yet
Lacking the concentration,
technique,
style of the others.
The perfectionist takes fifth place.

As the coach extends a helping hand,
the perfectionist hears "try harder"
"too slow"
"too bad."
The audience, "outstanding!"

Look again, and see the perfectionist at
a scholastic bee, focusing on his knowledge.
He is third to last,
third to the front,
up next to give his answer
before his peers.

The boy steps to the microphone
the question is asked
"How is committed spelled?"

Focused, the perfectionist gives his reply,
misses a "t"
heads for his seat.
Condolences are passed his way,
people say "good job."

***Michael Lowe** is 14 years old and in the 8th grade at Hardin Middle School in Montana.*

continued on next page

His ears, however, only hear "You're no good"
"You're stupid"
"Even I got that."

Or, see the boy on the dance floor
trying to work up his courage.
He goes to the girl,
walks past her,
mentally crucifies himself once more.

The girl asks him to dance,
he does. At the end,
he thanks her,
only to perceive in her eyes, false gratitude,
merriment,
and ridicule.
Bashful, he walks away,
chastened.

The worst time for any perfectionist
is when the people say the magic words.
Say them as a chant,
a jeer,
a praise.

These words the perfectionist can't stand
to most ears sound "Everybody knows you're good."
To the ears of a perfectionist,
these words include a debt,
a loan,
a responsibility to be "perfect"

❖

Aspectus

In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Personal Learning Style.
Thomas Armstrong. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1988.
ISBN: 0-87477-466-7. 224pp. (paper 8.95)

> *...there is a group of children totally unable to keep up with the charade, [of traditional classroom education] mostly because their own unique ways of learning clash so severely with the narrow way that the schools go about educating them.* (p. 6)

In 1981, Thomas Armstrong, a learning disabilities specialist, quit his job because he believed that much of his work was reinforcing a sense of failure in students who fell outside of the classroom norm. He found that schools had lost the ability to respond to individual differences and that this was why many students (including many gifted) were being labeled hyperactive, learning disabled or underachieving. Students, he maintained, were being blamed because their teachers were unable to teach them in ways that they could truly learn. From the abrasive nature of many classroom interactions to a steadily declining interest in *all* subjects as students spend more time in school, *In Their Own Way* documents the decline of a system that has, since the mid 1970s, provided labels and "disability" programs, but not necessarily an appropriate education, for these students.

Armstrong asserts that traditional classroom teaching involves too much teacher talk, overuse of textbooks, overemphasis on teaching specific skills and over-reliance on grouping children by ability or achievement. These methods teach primarily to linguistic and logical-mathematical students, leaving those with other learning styles to make do as best they can. Because learning styles are not clearly understood by many teachers, they are not drawing the best, or in some cases anything, out of many American children.

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal and intrapersonal) forms the basis for Armstrong's approach to teaching students in their own way. Armstrong notes that students can have a combination of intelligences. He believes that when we identify and teach to a student's learning style(s), many learning disabilities disappear and students are motivated to learn.

Armstrong characterizes children's natural learning process as a series of scientific revolutions. Drawn from a model developed by Princeton Professor Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Armstrong explains that a child begins learning by maintaining a firm hold on the ruling paradigm while looking for evidence to confirm it. As time passes, contrary evidence begins to accumulate. When this evidence can no longer be ignored, a revolution occurs and a new viewpoint is born. Armstrong notes that children will not readily let go of their beliefs until they are developmentally ready and enough contrary evidence has built up to warrant a shift. This means that children are not wired to take the teacher's word as gospel but require a variety of experiences to generate evidence which will, if warranted, lead to new understanding. In essence, they are already critical thinkers if we give them the opportunity to explore ideas and convince themselves.

In Their Own Way comments on the history of education and specifically *special education* since the mid 1970's. It also reviews children's developmental needs and contrasts these with the type of programming often offered in schools. The practical aspects of teaching to diverse learning styles can be found in a chapter divided into seven intelligences. A bibliography is also organized by learning styles providing teachers and parents with an opportunity to build up some contrary evidence to challenge their own beliefs about traditional education.

One would hope that after a decade, we would have much to show for this man's efforts in clarifying our thinking about how children learn. But this does not appear to be the case. Much to the concern and bewilderment of parents and teachers, "[m]any children all too often fall onto the negative side of the learning ledger. Living in a world where people regard their uniqueness as unacceptable, they either quietly submit and spend much of their lives attempting to be as bland and normal as possible, or they go on the defensive and end up in a perpetual battle with those who might otherwise help them learn." (p. 114) C.R. ❖

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Dedicated to helping gifted children reach their full potential

Summer, 1997 Volume 9, Issue 4

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Focus: Learning Differences

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Between the Lines

Different learning styles are not exclusive to gifted kids. There are probably as many different ways of absorbing information as there are children in learning situations. However, we tend to talk a lot about various styles, abilities, paces and idiosyncracies among the gifted because they are so intense in whatever they do that we—their parents and teachers—need to deal with their needs in immediate and often unique ways. Solutions do not easily manifest themselves in a society that functions within a framework of grade and age level expectations, with required labels placed on children who vary from the norm.

The writers of the articles in this journal have drawn on their experiences with a variety of learning differences in gifted children, offering an abundance of suggestions and issues to ponder. A recent essay on *diversity (A Disability or a Gift? CEC Today,* September, 1997, p.7) makes me want to add my "two cents worth." The essay points out that, among various cultures throughout the world, there may be "no word for—and no concept of—disability...individuals with 'disabilities' are accepted as they are...the 'disability' may even be thought to be a special gift." Anyone with "special needs is seen as an integral part of the community...[with] talents to contribute."

No labels, no stigma, no apologies for being different. Just acceptance for who you are. What a message for those who teach and raise children, and for the children themselves.

In my Utopian school the only labels placed on children are their names. Their education is individualized, and each individual is encouraged and challenged to develop to whatever potential is realistic for that youngster. Utopia? It doesn't have to be. Disabled or talented or so-called average—all kids learn differently, and all need to be valued and encouraged for those differences, not in spite of them. ❖

D.K.

Focus

Riddle Me This

Priscilla Vail

"Riddle me this" is an old-fashioned New England way of saying, "Here's a puzzle," "Explain this inconsistency" or "Resolve this incongruity." And puzzle, inconsistency and incongruity are what gifted learning disabled students are all about. Discrepancy is the marker for "riddle me this."

Some of these students may be strong in mathematical and spatial areas and weak in verbal skills. Their reading, writing, spelling and pencil/paper arithmetic skills, as well as their ability to organize what they read and write, will be low in comparison to their superior potential in such three-dimensional realms as mathematics, medicine, engineering (including the ability to fix the family car), science, the arts, athletics, drama or politics.

One might be a superbly coordinated athlete who can put his or her body anywhere on the sports field yet has illegible handwriting. Another might be the conceptually alive student who makes outstanding contributions to class discussions but whose test papers and exams are messy, inaccurate, and woefully lacking in organization. Or we could cite the keen mathematical thinker, who recognizes patterns and whose spatial concepts are stellar, but who falters in word recognition, handwriting or keeping numbers in tidy columns. Perhaps this is the place to make a necessary but often neglected distinction between arithmetic and mathematics.

Because arithmetic is presented in the early grades, and students are asked to memorize combinations and write down answers, many children and adults assume that computation and tidy notation are the same as mathematics. Children whose writing is untidy or who have trouble with rote memory often decide they are bad at math when, in fact, they may be potentially powerful mathematical thinkers. We need to keep reminding ourselves, educators and parents, not to mention students, that mathematics is a language and a symbol system through which human beings try to organize the spatial aspects of the world. Mathematics allows us to ask the questions which help us discover the rules governing our universe. If arithmetic is the kingdom of single correct answers, then mathematics is the kingdom of questions.

Last week I was walking down a school hallway and saw metaphoric smoke billowing over the door sill of my colleague's 5th-grade classroom. I knocked and walked in. "Something wrong?" I asked. "Wrong? You're right, something's wrong. Just look at this!" From her desk she snatched up a paper, smacked it with the back of her hand and said "Just look at this!" She held out a composition written by Fred, the top math student in his division, as well as president of his class. In this essay, Fred had used the word *neighbor* six times... with six different spellings. Although his attempts contained many correct letters, they were sprinkled through the words in random order as though they came out of a Mrs. Dash shaker: *niegbhor, nigheber, nieoghbr, niboeghr, neibghr* and finally *naber.*

"What's surprising about that?" I asked. "We both know that Fred would have trouble with a word like *neighbor*. He may have to use *friend* or, if

- *continued on next page*

***Priscilla Vail** is a learning specialist, consultant and author whose work centers on the identification of different learning styles and their accommodation in the regular classroom, small groups, individually and at home. Her books include The World of the Gifted Child and Smart Kids with School Problems.*

Riddle Me This

Continued

that's too much, he can always go back to *pal*."

"You don't understand," she seethed. "I could forgive the *neighbor* fiasco if it weren't for this." She opened her desk drawer and whipped out another piece of paper, thrusting it toward me in an accusatory manner. "Just look at *this*!" There, also the work of Fred's pencil, was a perfect drawing of the facade of a gothic cathedral. Every arch, portal and buttress was in place, the rose window was perfect and the gargoyles gazed downward protectively. "If he can remember all these details, he can remember the details in the word *neighbor*. If he would pay as much attention to his written work as he does to his drawing, he might make something of himself. If he can do the math he does, if he can be a natural leader, he's smart. If he's smart he can get this spelling right. The trouble with him is that he only does what he feels like doing!" Wrong.

Fred's *neighbor* disaster and cathedral triumph are perfect examples of the discrepant function which drives adults crazy and leaves kids wondering what's wrong with themselves. They may even begin to absorb the negative judgments of the adult world, deciding that they are, indeed, flawed, bad people. In fact, they are simply performing in ways dictated by the hard wiring and architecture of their own brains.

Julian is the opposite. He has high verbal talent and low mathematical and spatial abilities. A student in 5th grade in a highly regarded public school system, Julian learned to read quickly and easily. His spelling was meticulous from the beginning, and when doing worksheets or work book pages requiring him to fill in the blanks with single word answers, his work was perfect. His parents and his teachers in the early grades considered him an outstanding student and set their expectations accordingly.

Because he is a boy, people were apt to say of his handwriting, "Oh well, the computer will take care of all of that soon enough," or "Lots of boys have messy handwriting. It'll straighten out as he gets older." Of his difficulty memorizing arithmetic combinations, they said, "His memory seems weak, but his reading comprehension is so strong and he remembers everything he's ever seen in a book. This must just be a quirk. He'll remember his facts when they mean something to him."

But that was just the problem: intellectually, he knew what the numbers were supposed to accomplish, what they were designed to illuminate, but he couldn't see the patterns in his head. Also, when asked to give arithmetic answers quickly in class in such games as *Around the World*, his gears would lock and his fears would overwhelm him. Since we know that anxiety is the enemy of memory, we can imagine how he felt and what he could and could not do.

Julian's school offered marginal handwriting instruction. The children were allowed to use upper and lower case letters indiscriminately in their invented spelling in kindergarten. In 1st and 2nd grades they received "lick and a promise" training in manuscript. In 3rd grade they were expected (required) to switch over to cursive after a minimum of training which sufficed for the kids with smooth pencil control but left the others in the dust. By mid-3rd grade, Julian still interspersed capitals and lower case letters, his handwriting was a melange of different styles, his hand tired very easily because he had developed a cramping pencil grip and he was ashamed of the appearance of his efforts.

At the same time, the curriculum was moving away from work sheets and single-word-answer exercises. Now, in both reading and writing, students were being asked to use their cognitive skills, to infer, to explain, to relate, to describe, to discuss. While Julian understood and remembered what he read, he had trouble organizing his thoughts into orderly output. This, coupled with his difficulty in handwriting, made written assignments disheartening and disastrous in equal measure.

As work with numbers gradually shifted from arithmetic to mathematical concepts, Julian became hopelessly confused. His overall poor spatial sense provided a weak foundation for one of the main jobs of mathematics: determining where things are in space and in relation to one another. Spatial weaknesses undermined his handwriting, his athletic coordination, and his ability to organize abstract thought into orderly sequence and categories. Yet, the adult world didn't see the crippling power of his weaknesses and continued to peg overall academic expectations at the high level of his reading ability.

What can we learn from these two representative cases that will help us understand all children better? What might testing reveal? What would these students' profiles look like?

In some instances, all the information we need is already in the file drawer, so before we rush off to "get testing," it's important to look

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Riddle Me This

Continued

and see what information we already have. Next we need to remember the Ten Commandments of Testing:

- Remember that the test results should paint a vivid picture of the child you know.
- Remember that a test measures one child's performance on one day on one instrument.
- Remember that diagnosis is the basis for prescription: It must be on target.
- Remember that the tester sets the emotional climate of the experience; choose carefully.
- Remember that intelligence testing (such as the WISC III) tries to measure intelligence.
- Remember that achievement testing (such as SAT) measures what students have learned.
- Remember that diagnostic testing charts individual learning strengths and weaknesses.
- Remember that these are complementary but not interchangeable.
- Remember that the most valuable testing information highlights patterns and clusters.
- Remember that an IQ score is a composite number; it does not show peaks and valleys.

Interestingly, Fred and Julian had overall IQ scores within two points of one another, yet we know from the above how very different they are. Fred's full scale IQ was 121, Julian's 123. What does this mean? On a WISC III (Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children , Version III) 100 is the norm, with a standard deviation of 10. This means that scores from 90-110 are within the norm. The higher one goes from 100 the greater the implied intellectual strength, the lower one drops from 100 the greater the implied intellectual weakness.

The full scale IQ is determined by putting the verbal IQ and the performance IQ scores into a conversion table in the back of the manual. Since the full scale IQ is only a composite number it is, therefore, the least valuable information derived from the testing.

The verbal IQ and the performance IQ are, in turn, products of subtest scores in their own categories. These subtest scores range from 1-19, 10 being the norm.

Remember that a test measures one child's performance on one day on one instrument.

In looking at WISC III results we notice "discrepancy" and "scatter." We look for discrepancy between verbal and performance IQs. When we look at the subtest scores within the verbal and the performance categories, we look for scatter: how widely do the scores vary, and which scores cluster together?

Without infringing on protocol or using actual examples, here is what a student would be asked to do on a WISC III. All subtests are administered individually, a few have a memory component, only one or two require a pencil.

On the verbal side, the examiner would test:

Vocabulary: taps knowledge of words and ability to define

Similarities: taps abstract verbal reasoning and explanation of how specific items are alike and different

Comprehension: taps social comprehension of appropriate behavior: what would you do if you were already late for an appointment, and you fell and cut your knee and had to go to the doctor to be treated?

Information: taps general knowledge such as, what are the four points of the compass?

Arithmetic: taps the capacity to figure out word problems in your head

Digit Span: taps the capacity to repeat strings of numbers from memory, forwards and backwards

On the performance side, the examiner would test:

Picture Completion: taps attention to visual detail

Coding: taps ability to see, remember and copy unfamiliar geometric designs as rapidly as possible

Picture Arrangement: taps the capacity to see a collection of pictures, infer the overall story, then arrange the pictures in correct sequence

Block Design: taps the ability to see a printed geometric design and reproduce it, using small colored cubes

Object Assembly: taps the capacity to see a collection of puzzle pieces, infer the overall design and assemble the puzzle pieces accordingly

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Riddle Me This

Continued

Symbol Search: taps the capacity to scan for stimulus

Mazes: taps the capacity to anticipate obstacles and plan a successful path

What patterns emerged from Fred's and Julian's testing? Each boy's full scale IQ was well above the norm. Each boy had a notable discrepancy between verbal and performance scores, as well as clustering scores in predictable areas. Fred's highest scores were in Block Design, Object Assembly, Information, Similarities and Comprehension. These validated a strong spatial sense, abstract reasoning in the three dimensional realm, powerful mathematical thinking, strong verbal reasoning supported by a reliable and powerful fund of general information and a well developed social sense. His lowest scores were in Coding, Symbol Search and Digit Span. These are consistent with his spelling problems, his "quick and dirty" reading, his careless errors in arithmetic and his poorly developed handwriting. His profile is a classic of high mathematical concepts and low arithmetical mechanics.

Julian's clustering high scores were in Information, Similarities, Vocabulary, Symbol Search and Picture Completion. These were consistent with his strong reading, enjoyment of verbal abstraction, rich personal vocabulary and attention to visual detail and highly accurate spelling. His low scores clustered in Picture Arrangement, Block Design, Object Assembly and Mazes. These matched his difficulties with spatial organization and sequencing and his overall notable weakness in the three-dimensional realm. Additionally, his low score in Comprehension is consistent with his clumsy social skills.

What does this tell us? We can see clearly that differing patterns can produce nearly identical scores. Thus, simply looking at a full scale IQ score won't tell us much about the person.

We see that discrepancy is not the same as limited intellect.

When we study and cluster subtest scores on both the verbal and the performance sides, striking and accurate patterns emerge. These patterns validate the kind of discrepant academic performance we see in the boys described here, as well as in the students we meet in our own lives. For our purposes, here, we are using testing information *retroactively*. That is, we are seeing in the numbers what we have already observed in the two boys themselves.

But we can also use results *predictively*, particularly if we adhere to the Ten Commandments of Testing. This can help us plan for the showcase of talent, as well as the support of weakness. Both need attention and a hearty share of the budget of time and energy, as well as money; unsupported weaknesses ache just as unexercised talents itch.

Riddle me this? Fred and Julian have nearly opposite intellectual profiles, yet their human needs are identical. The same is true of the many females whose stories are not included in this brief discourse. Each has talent. Each is gifted. Their gifts and talents deserve protection and nurture during the school years so they will flower fully in later life.

Seen in this way, they don't present a very big riddle after all. ❖

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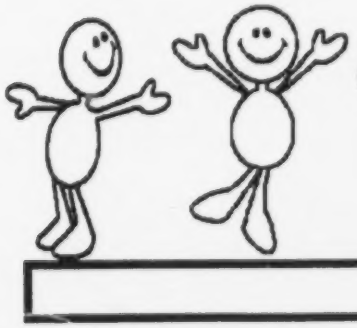

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Focus

Reading Disorders and the Gifted Child

Betsy Kutrumbos & Gerri Masson

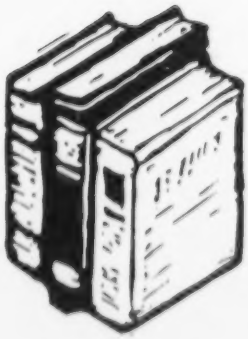
Promising Solutions in Current Reading Research

Recently we overheard two moms comparing notes in our waiting room. Kate was playing with her vivacious young gifted daughter Megan. Karen was anxiously waiting for her daughter Jenny, a high school senior, to finish her educational evaluation. Karen was reminiscing fondly about how much little Megan reminded her of Jenny as a 1st grader. The bubbly chatter, the conversations of the doll house residents and the sheer joy of happy play, were bittersweet to that mother, who wondered how Jenny had gone from being an exuberant force of nature at 7 to the depressed, defeated, self-doubting young woman we were testing.

If only we knew then what we know now.

Reading Potential

When considering reading and gifted children, it is both important to expand the definition of literacy and helpful to look at literacy potential. Many gifted children with reading disorders seem to be quite literate. Such children tend to use their extraordinary verbal skills to disguise an underlying weakness with reading/decoding. Strategies such as the use of prediction, inference, guessing and just plain getting the gist are somewhat effective for routine, nonchallenging reading. These strategies, however, tend to break down with more complex reading tasks such as *The Scarlet Letter, The Federalist Papers* or a calculus textbook. Our expectation for gifted children rightly involves college prep, honors classes, high school advanced placement or international baccalaureate level classes. According to Shaywitz (1996), many bright people with reading disorders, "have learned how to decode or identify words, therefore gaining entry to the high level of the language system, but they do so at a cost. Time tests reveal that decoding remains very laborious (p. 213). Therefore, the students, "are neither automatic nor fluent in the ability to identify words (p. 214)." Reading is therefore a laborious, tiring, energy-intensive and inefficient process. Frustration, avoidance of complex reading and underachievement often result. The gap between verbal ability as seen through spoken language and literacy as seen through written language widens over time.



The inability to learn to read is a complex and multi-faceted problem. Reading has been investigated since the beginning of this century, but in the last 20 years significant studies have greatly contributed to the understanding of the psychological process of reading. Recently, progress has been made in the study of reading as a result of reliable research findings. Wherein, there is general agreement that acquisition of basic word identification skills (including sight-word recognition as well as the ability to decode or sound out unknown words) is a major problem for most individuals with reading disabilities. In addition, phonological processes appear to be the core cognitive deficits associated with reading difficulties (Stanovich, 1988).

Phonological processing refers to the individual's ability to use the

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***Gerri Masson,** Educational Counseling Services in Denver, specializes in assessment, strategies for bright students with learning differences, writing skills and college counseling for twice exceptional students.*

speech sound structure of oral language in learning written language. Three major types of phonological processing have been identified by researchers as the most critical for the development of basic reading skills: phonological awareness, phonological coding and working memory (verbal short term memory), and phonological coding the lexical access (rapid automatic naming) (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). If children fail to acquire accurate and fluent word identification skills in the early school years, this failure often results in avoidance of reading and decreased exposure to print, which can contribute to later difficulties with reading comprehension. Children who begin school with little phonemic awareness will have trouble acquiring the alphabet principle, which will in turn limit their ability to decode words (Blachman, 1991). The consequences of early reading failure have been described as "Matthew effects" by Stanovich (1988). Because young, poor readers are exposed to less print and practice reading less, they fail to develop fluency in their reading which in turn limits their comprehension. Limitations in phonological awareness lead to slow, labored and inaccurate decoding of words, which in turn leads to poor reading comprehension (Lyon, 1995).

What is phonemic awareness and how is it acquired? Phonemic awareness is the conscious awareness that words are made up of sounds. While this awareness is not necessary to speak and understand speech, and although the precise nature of its role is not yet fully understood, phonemic awareness seems to play an important role in beginning reading. Researchers suggest that children without phonemic awareness tend to be poor readers and that training in phonemic awareness can improve reading achievement.

Some beginning readers may approach reading by memorizing each word as a wholistic visual pattern and never manage to see the alphabetic principle on their own (Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Lieberman & Shankweiler, 1985). Children without phonemic awareness may have a learning curve in reading that begins strongly, then levels out. They acquire a relatively small reading vocabulary (estimated at a few thousand words) in the primary grades and then learn no more (Glietman, 1985). Relying solely on memorizing sight words as a reading strategy limits children's ability to become independent readers because they have not discovered the means to unlock the code or the ability to decipher words not previously memorized. Phonemic awareness is not the same thing as phonics. Phonics generally refer to using letter sounds and other rules to sound out words. Memorizing letter-sound correspondences does not necessarily mean that children are using the alphabetic principle to read (Goswami & Bryant, 1990). In fact, students who lack phonemic awareness probably do not benefit from phonics instruction any more than they benefit from a whole language instructional approach. The beginning reader must begin to understand the systematic relationship that exists between the letters of the alphabet and the underlying sounds they attempt to represent. Our system of writing is an alphabetic one, as opposed to an ideographic or meaning-based system. Therefore, a key to skilled reading is the ability to decipher and use the alphabetic code.

How are phonemic skills learned? Phonemic awareness is part of a hierarchy of meta-linguistic skills that develop gradually (Lieberman & Shankweiler, 1985; Stahl & Murray, 1994). Children become aware of larger linguistic units, syllables and words before they become aware of smaller linguistic units, phonemes, or individual sounds. Children develop awareness that sentences and phrases are comprised of discrete words at about three years old. For example, children younger than three are likely to say that a sentence "Mommy went outside" is comprised of two words — "Mommy" and "went outside." Syllable awareness seems to be a necessary intermediate step on the way to phonemic awareness. By the end of kindergarten 90% of children are able to tap out syllables in words. Five levels of phonemic awareness, beginning with the easiest and progressing to the most difficult, have been identified by Adams (1990). First, is the appreciation of sounds in spoken language, which can be observed in children's delight in reciting nursery rhymes. Second, is the ability to compare and contrast sounds in words by grouping words with similar or dissimilar sounds at the beginning, middle or end of a word. Third, is the ability to blend and split syllables. Fourth, is phonemic segmentation or the ability to isolate individual sounds in syllables; for example, a kindergarten child should be able to sound out the three phonemes in the word "cat." Fifth, is the ability to manipulate phonemes or sounds by omitting and deleting phonemes to make new words. Torgeson and Morgan (1990,1992) have divided phonemic awareness tasks into analysis and synthesis skills. Phonemic analysis refers to a child being able to identify individual phonemes in a word. For example, say the word "fat" without the "f" sound. Synthesis refers

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Reading Disorders

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to a blending task in which the child must pronounce a word after hearing the segment. For example, hearing the individual sounds "m/a/t" the child will be able to say the word "mat." According to the researchers, performance on both segmenting and blending tasks is highly correlated to learning early reading skills.

Why are these tasks important? By studying those most skilled at reading, researchers have been able to identify the progression in learning to read well. Good readers have well developed phonological skills by the age of 6 or 7. This development in understanding the sounds of our language helps young readers to identify and decode new words. It also aids children in noticing the combinations of letters in words and therefore forming useful sight word representations. As beginning readers become adept at decoding, they are exposed to more and more print as they begin to enjoy reading. By the 3rd or 4th grade, the best readers have developed a sight vocabulary of at least 10,000 words. In order to develop a sight vocabulary of this size, readers must be accurate in their decoding skills. By 5th or 6th grade the most skilled readers no longer appear to rely on decoding strategies because most words are recognized by sight. These excellent readers are typically fluent both in reading and spelling skills. When they encounter words not in their sight vocabulary, they are automatically and rapidly able to decode new words. Once decoded, these words are added to their rapidly growing sight word vocabulary.

In contrast, poor readers appear to rely on their visual memory, as well as contextual clues, in order to guess at unknown words. While this strategy at times can be effective, it is inaccurate and also causes the reading to be nonautomatic and less fluent, therefore making comprehension inaccurate and reading speed slow. By the end of 5th grade children with reading difficulties appear to be about 3 1/2 grade levels below in word decoding and 2 1/2 grade levels below in sight word development as compared to skilled readers. At this point children with reading difficulties appear to be unable to profit from normal reading instruction. Typically by this stage most gifted children have experienced significant personal failure and feelings of frustration. They often perceive themselves as "dumb" and begin to withdraw or act out in school. According to the Orton Dyslexia Society (Henry, 1996), few people with severe reading disabilities or dyslexia exhibit all the signs of this disorder, but some of the common indicators will be present: difficulty sounding out unknown words, difficulty with spelling, and lack of phonemic awareness or the understanding of sounds in words, rhymes, or sequence of sounds in syllables. These difficulties are exhibited when sequencing numbers, letters in words when read or written (for example, "b" and "d" confusion, saying or writing "gril" for "girl," and "21" for "12"), difficulty in writing, delayed spoken language, difficulty in interpreting what is heard, difficulty or delay in expressing thoughts, problems with reading comprehension, limited understanding of time and directions (e.g., left and right, yesterday and tomorrow, months, days, etc.), difficulty with handwriting and difficulty in learning sequential steps of math (e.g., math facts, directionality or mathematical language).

It is critical to identify children who are at risk for reading disabilities early...while it is possible to improve the reading skills of older dyslexics, it is more difficult.

Reading disability or dyslexia is not correlated with intelligence, but an unexpected gap exists between children's aptitude and school achievement. The problem is not associated with behavioral, psychological, motivational and social behaviors. Very few people with dyslexia have any visual problems; rather, this disorder is seen as a language processing difficulty. Individuals with severe reading disabilities often are gifted and productive; however, they learn differently. They often show special talents in areas that require spatial/visual motor integration abilities. Throughout history dyslexics have been shown to be creative and many have talents in areas such as art, athletics, architecture, graphics, engineering, mechanics, drama, music or electronics. Dyslexics also may have highly developed verbal abilities; however, they have difficulty with the mechanics of print. It is critical to identify children who are at risk for reading disabilities early. However, clinical and research studies have shown that while it is possible to improve the reading skills of older dyslexics, it is more difficult (Kutrumbos, 1993).

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Reading Disorders

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Of particular importance for identifying gifted children who are at risk or who are currently reading disabled, a number of studies indicate that phonological processing deficits are associated with reading difficulty regardless of whether or not a discrepancy between measures of reading and intelligence exist (Lyon, 1995). Because of the public school reliance on an IQ-ability discrepancy formula, there are many gifted children who are never properly diagnosed or treated. They "fall between the cracks" because they are not considered eligible for special services.

Informal Diagnosis

What might parents see in the developmental history and behavior of a young gifted child who is at risk for a reading disorder?

- Family history of underachievement or reading problems
- Speech problems
- Early or frequent ear infections or allergies leading to upper respiratory infections
- Difficulty learning letter/sound correspondence (alphabetical code)
- Reversing letters, numbers or reading and writing letters or syllables in confused order
- Inability to rhyme (slow reading speed)
- Trouble telling right and left
- Inability to break down the sounds in words
- Difficulty rapidly accessing previously learned information such as the alphabet or days of the week
- Inability to follow oral directions

The gifted primary child who fits this profile might look a lot like Danny. When Danny came in to be tested he was obviously a very precocious 2nd grader. He was overflowing with excitement and information about the Pathfinder — Stephen Hawking move over! Danny was bubbling over with the love of learning and declared that school was fun, especially science and math. So what was the problem? Danny heaved a mighty sigh, put his hands on his hips, and said, "I gotta get out of that low reading group!"

Danny's IQ was determined to be in the very superior range. His math skills were four years above grade level, but word attack skills and reading comprehension were barely at grade level in spite of a strong sight vocabulary and an enriched environment. After some specific intense reading remediation, including systematic phonics, Danny did get out of that reading group!

What might we see in intermediate grade children?

- Avoidance of reading
- Tendency to remain at a comfortable level with books (i.e. re-reading books) rather than choosing increasingly difficult texts
- Slow reading speed
- Failure to choose increasingly difficult text
- Little or no reading for pleasure
- Increasing gap between speaking vocabulary and reading vocabulary
- Reliance on contextual and visual clues
- Reluctance to read out loud
- Failure to develop appropriately in the area of spelling
- Difficulty with comprehension, particularly of low-interest text

No one who met Natalie would dream that she was having problems with literacy. She's the gifted little lioness — highly verbal, fiercely independent and prickly as a cactus. She is very adept at using all of these strong willed personality traits to cover up what's really going on. Reading for her is no pleasure. "It is so BORING! So IRRELEVANT!"

Natalie did not come happily to the assessment process. She was obviously humiliated by the weak areas that surfaced and was so angry at the results of the assessment that she actually left the room. With great reluctance and overt parental encouragement, including flat out bribery, she spent four weeks in an intensive reading remediation program featuring systematic phonics. Her grades have shot up since, although the program "really didn't work that well." She's been seen giving private reading sessions to friends and has also lost her adversarial edge. This prickly cactus is blooming.

What might we see in a high school or college student?

- Avoidance of reading
- Over dependence on contextual clues
- Poor comprehension
- Slow reading speed
- Verbal SAT scores lower than grades would predict
- Increasing frustration with complex written language
- Feelings of not being "college material"
- Totally overwhelmed and panicky

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Reading Disorders

Continued

Shaywitz (1996) describes such a young man this way:

A medical student named Gregory came to see us after undergoing a series of problems in his first-year courses. He was quite discouraged. Although he had been diagnosed as dyslexic in grade school, Gregory had also been placed in a program for gifted students. His native intelligence, together with extensive support and tutoring, had allowed him to graduate from high school with honors and gain admission to an Ivy League college. In college, Gregory had worked extremely hard and eventually received offers from several top medical schools. Now, however, he was beginning to doubt his own competence. He had no trouble comprehending the intricate relations among physiological systems or the complex mechanisms of disease; indeed, he excelled in those areas requiring reasoning skills. More problematic for him was the simple act of pronouncing long words or novel terms (such as labels used in anatomic descriptions); perhaps his least well-developed skill was rote memorization.

Both Gregory and his professors were perplexed by the inconsistencies of his performance. How could someone who understood difficult concepts so well have trouble with the smaller and simpler details? Could Gregory's dyslexia — he was still a slow reader — account for his inability to name body parts and tissue types in the face of his excellent reasoning skills?

And the toughest cases of all... Just yesterday we got a call from Michael, the classic gifted young adult dyslexic. His counselor suggested that he call us. He finished high school with a GED and dropped out of college last year after two years. He believes he has a reading problem and he wants to go back to school. He asked us to mail him some information on our services. He does not have a phone number because, "Unfortunately, I am currently in the county jail," and "I really need to get it together." This is very sad. Who knows what led him to this place, but weak literacy skills certainly didn't help him.

Formal Diagnosis

It is important that a child who seems to be experiencing even subtle difficulties with reading be formally assessed. Formal assessment is needed, not only to identify reading disorders, but also to screen for several other possible problems that may have a negative impact on achievement. These problems may include, but are not limited to, motor processing difficulties, attentional problems, inefficient memory, emotional difficulties or motivational problems. Any of these problems can happen in conjunction with reading disorders.

A solid assessment should consist of several components:

- A detailed developmental history
- A detailed academic history
- An intelligence test such as the WISC-III (all subtests)
- Test of phonemic awareness such as the Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test
- Cognitive and achievement batteries of the Woodcock/Johnson-Revised or comparable instrument (both standard and supplemental batteries)
- Tests of word decoding and spelling
- Reading comprehension and fluency tests such as the Gray Oral Reading Test
- A social/emotional component

What is the best treatment approach for children with language based reading disabilities? During the past five years a number of well

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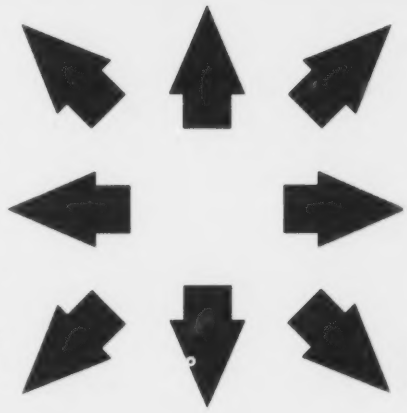
Reading Disorders

Continued

designed treatment or intervention studies have been conducted (Ball & Blachman, 1991; Blachman, Ball & Black, 1994; Torgeson & Morgan, 1992; Torgeson, Wagner & Rashotte, 1994). According to Lyon & Chhabra (1996), the data from these studies indicates that children with phonological based reading disabilities require treatment programs which are comprised of a structured language program. Direct, explicit instruction in a symbol/sound system is critical. Most effective treatment programs appear to be multi-sensory. This means that teaching is done using all learning pathways simultaneously (visual, auditory and tactile senses) in order to enhance memory in learning. Multi-sensory language instruction requires that the organization of materials follows the logical order of the language. The sequence begins with the easiest and most basic elements and progresses to more difficult material. Children add on knowledge they have previously mastered. Concepts must be taught systematically and reviewed in order to strengthen memory; particularly with very bright children, inferential learning of any concept cannot be taken for granted. Direct instruction of all concepts with continuous student/teacher interaction is critical. The most effective teachers must be adept at individualizing teaching for reading disabled students. The teaching should include careful and continuous assessment of the individual's needs. The child must master and over-learn each new skill to the degree that it becomes automatic.

There are a number of systematic phonics programs that are well supported by the research. They include Alphabetics Phonics, Recipe For Reading, Explode The Code, Project Read, The Norton Gillingham Reading Program, Slingerland Program, The Lindamood Auditory Discrimination In-Depth Program, to name a few. Parents of children with reading disabilities should seek out teachers or tutors with education in theoretically sound remedial methods. These methods should acknowledge the primary deficits in phonemic awareness and in processes in short term memory that depend directly on using speech-based codes. Programs for the reading disabled must also deal with secondary problems like comprehension, motivation, attention and low self-esteem, which may be the result of frustration around reading (Kutrumbos, 1993). Children with reading disabilities can learn to spell phonetically when their training programs include multi-sensory manipulation of common spelling patterns. Words included in spelling programs should begin with phonetically predictable words, then progress to commonly used words, then to words from the student's work. Students can be taught in a small-group format, but spelling mastery lists should be individualized. The current research indicates that standard reading instruction will be more effective when it includes phonemic awareness for beginning readers as well as disabled readers. The ideal time to begin phonemic awareness training would be in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and 1st grade; however, these skills can be taught directly to readers of any age. As many parents are finding out, much of the current information about reading development has not been included in teacher/training programs. Therefore, as parents begin requesting appropriate reading instruction for their children they may find that this information has not yet been mastered by classroom or special education teachers. Both teachers and students need to become aware of the structure of the English language and discuss language sounds, patterns and concepts in order to strengthen existing reading programs.



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Some gifted children are not performing at their expected literacy potential. While there may be many reasons for this discrepancy some of these children may have subtle undiagnosed learning disabilities. Current research suggests that with careful diagnosis and direct and appropriate treatment, children with reading disabilities can gain the skills necessary to succeed. ❖

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FOCUS

The Gifted/Syntopical Thinker

Cal Roberts

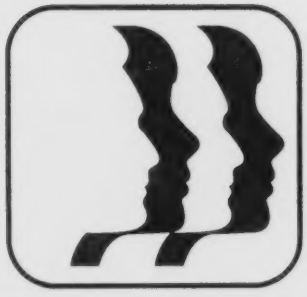
Inherent in the things to be learned we should be able to find inner connections that might enable us to discover a significant pattern of their relationship to one another.

Adler, *1986*, pp.10-11

How many of us have witnessed a gifted child mow though a topic — dinosaurs, ancient Egyptians, space exploration or countless others? Voracious hunters on a quest for answers, these children can rapidly acquire an encyclopedic understanding of their areas of interest. Ask them the names of authors and experts who share their passion, and hear them speak names of experts as if they were colleagues or friends.

Many gifted children do not approach learning by searching out a single author's viewpoint in a particular subject area. Instead, they seem to know early on that multiple viewpoints exist and that these often contradict one another. Rather than assuming that "experts" know best, gifted learners often have hypotheses of their own to explore. For them, learning can be a way to prove or disprove hypotheses *already* formulated. Like the experts, these learners approach reading, conversing and experimenting as methods to fill gaps in their theories.

Applied to the acquisition of reading skills, this manner of learning is called *syntopical* reading, as defined by Adler and Van Doren (1972). Syntopical reading describes a process of *comparative reading by subject*, often across many fields of study and covering all of history. Adler coined the word from the title of an index he edited called *The Syntopican*. This index served as an instrument for locating passages in the series *Great Books of the Western World* (Hutchins, ed.,1952) in which various authors discussed topics constituting the inner structure of great Western ideas. *Great Books* is divided into approximately 3,000 subject headings — a veritable gold mine for gifted readers.



Adler and Van Doren (1972) defined four levels of reading ability and noted that these levels are cumulative. For our purposes, these levels also provide another way of looking more closely at the learning processes of gifted children.

• **Elementary** reading is the process of learning letters and punctuation, developing and expanding vocabulary and achieving mastery of that vocabulary in context. This type of reading begins in kindergarten and proceeds approximately through middle school for the average student. The gifted reader, however, may reach this level well before entering school and be well into or beyond the next.

• **Inspectional** reading is the process of gleaning information about what a book has to offer through its structure. The table of contents, preface, appendices, all provide the inspectional reader with a ready-made abstract of the book's organization and the author's intention in writing it. Skimming for relevant content is also considered inspectional reading, helping readers to rapidly assess whether a book should be read more analytically.

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Gifted/Syntopical

Continued

Gifted readers often acquire the inspectional shortcut early in their reading careers and thus are loathe to spend time reading a book that focuses on areas which they have already mastered or in which they have no interest.

• **Analytical** reading is carried out by a reader (the novice) whose goal is to achieve a thorough understanding of a *single author's viewpoint* (the authority) on a subject. Reading analytically requires that the reader determine genre, understand the terms used by the author and the author's viewpoint and make a judgment about the completeness of the work. Through this process the reader emerges with a comprehensive understanding of a specific author's thesis.

Many gifted children are known not only for their ability to explain what the various arguments are for a particular subject, but they can often question "expert" hypotheses based on their vast knowledge of a subject. They will typically ignore volumes designed specifically for children, moving directly to the books that specialize in a field, searching for opinions that will further their understanding.

• **Syntopical** reading occurs when books become a way of exploring big ideas (love, death, honor, etc.) by examining and comparing multiple sources and viewpoints. Syntopical readers gather disparate terms, ideas and theories from numerous sources and use these to develop a bigger picture.

> *Knowing that more than one book is relevant to a particular question is the first requirement in any project of syntopical reading* (Adler, 1972, p. 309).

This approach often results in a form of intellectual pruning in which the dead wood of an idea is discarded, making room for shoots of new learning to emerge. Adler and Van Doren maintain that syntopical reading is the "ultimate goal of reading," but in order to achieve it, a reader must have already mastered the first three levels.

Syntopical readers tend to be big-picture thinkers, checking out every available book in their areas of interest and reading with such intensity that they are hard to divert, even for meals. Many gifted children seem to reach this syntopical approach to reading *and* thinking very early in their lives.

Syntopical readers tend to be big-picture thinkers, checking out every available book in their areas of interest and reading with such intensity that they are hard to divert, even for meals.

The Gifted/Syntopical Thinker

As we approach the end of the 20th century, our children are faced with a wealth of available information through many forms of media and experience. It makes sense, then, that young people are using more than reading material to flesh out their ideas, whether or not they are conscious of doing so.

The characteristics of the syntopical reader begin to resemble those of right-brained visual-spatial thinkers, a population discussed with increasing frequency in gifted literature in recent years (Armstrong, 1988; West, 1991). These individuals are big-picture thinkers who appear to approach *life* syntopically. For them, taking data from countless sources is what allows them to weave multiple strands of divergent information into cohesive, exciting new patterns. Like the syntopical reader, they gather data, determine what is of value and then analyze the significant concepts in relationship to a bigger picture.

However, many syntopical thinkers may not be voracious readers; rather, as children of the 20th century, they may be hungry for forms of media other than the printed word: movies, conversations and hands-on experiences among them. These individuals integrate overheard conversations, advertising, even visual, tactile or aural patterns, anything that can further their understanding in any domain, in any format. The real excitement for these thinkers seems to come as they arrange information in new configurations, often with exciting and even revolutionary results.

A child who is passionate about space exploration may find that her read-

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ing and other life experiences take her on an intellectual and spiritual exploration as far-reaching and exciting as any shuttle takeoff. Space exploration for a syntopical thinker might begin with scientific questions involving the size of celestial bodies and how they behave in space. This might lead to an interest in space station construction by way of architecture, physics and the nightly news. Historical questions might follow with topics ranging from the first moon walk to: "How did life begin and why?" Learning that the planets were named after Roman gods might lead to questions more spiritual in nature, "Is there one God, many or none at all?" Inquiries about the nature of the sun and its association with various monarchs throughout history could propel our learner into the complexities of the political arena. And before we know what's happened, our budding shuttle astronaut is contemplating the size of the known universe, the book of Genesis, black holes, the trials and tribulations of Copernicus and whether or not we are alone in the universe. This kind of big-picture thinking can and does occur when these children are quite young, often before they enter school. Problems can arise because syntopical thinkers can easily outstrip siblings, parents, peers and teachers in their conceptualization of a subject. This makes it difficult for them to share their theories or visions with anyone in their immediate circle and can lead to frustration and feelings of isolation.

Many syntopical thinkers rely heavily on books to provide them with a degree of collegiality that may be missing elsewhere in their lives, others might identify with characters, plots and themes in movies, while for some others, creating a world of their own ends up being the only satisfactory way to feel a sense of belonging. C.S. Lewis created whole countries complete with maps, communities and distinct cultural groups. These creations not only provided ample opportunity to practice storytelling, but they also served as vehicle for recognizing and synthesizing ideas.

Providing syntopical thinkers with tools to refine their searches, conversations to clarify their thinking, volumes of reading material and/or the experiences they crave can be exhausting for parents who are also charged with feeding, clothing and otherwise caring for them. These parents often look to schools to provide some relief, knowing full well that they will certainly need to supplement at home with extracurricular support.

The Gifted/Syntopical Thinker Goes to School

The day finally comes, and our little syntopical thinkers cheerfully climb aboard the big yellow bus prepared to attend to "real learning." They enter classrooms on their quest for answers, ready to chew through food-for-thought buffet style. But, all too often, in school syntopical thinkers choke on information provided to them one food group or course at a time.

Teaching methods that approach material in a sequential/analytical manner require syntopical thinkers to limit their picture of a subject in order to analyze ideas and terms one by one. They must proceed as the whole class does, sequentially, as ideas slowly build toward a *known* result. Restricted intellectually in this way, their natural process of acquiring and synthesizing information is thwarted. These learners are excited by what isn't known, by the prospect of filling in missing puzzle pieces. For those who think and function best in this way, learning is not rehashing what is known, but adding to it.

When syntopical learners are subjected to the daily requirement of sequential teaching, it can leave them feeling cheated and cynical about school. A kindergarten teacher, sensing a student is bored, might try to find a book on a topic of interest, dinosaurs for one particular little boy. However, the dinosaur book found in many kindergarten classrooms will seldom satisfy the child who could identify, classify and *spell* the names of the various known dinosaurs by age 4 and who is now in pursuit of understanding what the various experts in several scientific specialties believe happened to those prehistoric creatures.

Later in the day, this child is stymied again when the class visit to the outdated museum exhibit (to which his desperate parents have already taken him several times) turns up no new information. Even if the tour guide's understanding of prehistoric times is current with the latest research, he or she is typically unwilling to engage in anything approaching a peer discussion with a kindergartner. The teacher can add to the frustration by encouraging our syntopical thinker not to take too much time or attention away from the tightly-scheduled tour. Worse yet, many who provide tours for young children have not stayed current with recent developments

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and may react badly to a child whose questions make them look foolish. Situations such as this, in which they are expected to swallow misinformation as fact, eat away at children's respect for authority. Later, if asked to "prove" their knowledge through testing, essays or presentations, their resentment can be palpable. It's blatantly obvious to them that those in authority share neither their understanding nor their approach to learning.

Class discussions are yet another area in which the syntopical thinker can be misunderstood and even humiliated. The most well prepared teacher will not always be able to anticipate questions posed by gifted syntopical thinkers. A simple classroom talk about bus safety can turn into a full scale design lecture by a child whose interests include environmental design. This student's comments about the poor design of the bus loading zone will distract classmates from the safety information the teacher is trying to impart. Both the syntopical thinker and the teacher are interested in better safety, but while one is focusing on immediate concerns, the other is seeing a bigger picture and often getting into trouble for addressing it.

Syntopical thinkers can end up being shut down by their classmates' lack of comprehension (often expressed as teasing) or teachers' frustrations with questions that take "valuable" class time to address. This may lead syntopical thinkers to identify teachers as enemies. They can feel betrayed, not only by the individual teacher but also by what they were led to believe about school as a place of learning.

Oh yes, and they're often upset with parents, too...

Bringing it Home

In many cases, frustrations and humiliations show up when these children climb off the bus and spend the remaining daylight hours in states of tantrum. They need to unload hours of frustration and disappointment but are often unable to articulate exactly what it is they experienced at school. How to explain to Mom and Dad what they've been through? These big-picture kids have a viewpoint that is, to some degree, *informed by parents* who are doing their best to be supportive and positive about school.

Often these children blame themselves for their inability to conform to the classroom and its rules, even as they become increasingly aware that they cannot do anything to make the experience tolerable. It usually takes a level of unhappiness and misbehavior so unacceptable that parents, teachers and administrators begin to question whether school is an appropriate place for the child.

Classrooms that approach learning in a cookie-cutter fashion have dramatic and negative impacts on these children. The learning that best serves the gifted/syntopical thinker cannot be easily measured by no. 2 pencil-marked tests. This is why many parents of syntopical thinkers look for alternative or private schools offering small class size and plenty of hands-on learning. Other parents may choose to educate their child at home.

To be effective, education must provide the syntopical thinker with the latitude to pursue passionate inquiries over a wide swath of available material, traversing multiple fields of study and allowing for a thorough examination of multiple viewpoints. The truth seems to be that these thinkers seldom need a curriculum, indeed often doing better when not bound by guidelines. They do best when allowed to follow their inquiries through to a natural end without jarring interruptions such as the school bell and the introduction of new, and typically unrelated, "units."

As syntopical thinkers age, school programming becomes more accommodating, and this may be why many gifted students have an easier time in more traditional classrooms when they're older. College level and high school programs often require students to examine issues more thoroughly, providing them with greater freedom to access a variety of materials and to chart their own courses. But it must be remembered: these students are still syntopical thinkers! When asked to name a theme or topic for a paper, these are the students who will want to completely shift their focus when their research turns up exciting new information.

Suggestions for Aiding the Gifted/Syntopical Learner

• The gifted child's early ability at inspectional reading is one we should foster, as computer-based information systems give us increasing access to a world of information. Searching the internet can be a highly syntopical activity. A keyword search will pull up all sorts of materials from a vast collection of sources, helping syntopical thinkers to define the boundaries of the bigger picture by identifying additional areas they

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Gifted/Syntopical

Continued

might have otherwise overlooked.

• Syntopical thinkers often love reference books because they provide a variety of views on a multitude of subjects and excite readers to explore new areas of inquiry. Although your child may open a book to explore the history of moving pictures, she may close it knowing how rainbows are formed, the structure of the eye and the accomplishments of Sir Isaac Newton. Some encyclopedias on CD-ROM have "knowledge trees" that provide links to related information contained on the disk.

• Video stores often have references that separate films by topic for those whose interests manifest in the more visual realm.

• Rich musical and visual experiences, as found in museums, live theater and concerts, can also spur the syntopical thinker to further explorations. Listening to the works of Beethoven might lead to an interest in the history of music, and then on to its legacy of genius and heartbreak. This might then excite theories of how music acts upon the brain to improve IQ and what effect our cacophonous modern world has on the nature of relationships.

• Younger syntopical thinkers really benefit from hands-on learning experiences that help them examine concepts in their areas of interest. Later, when they approach these concepts in a more abstract form they have concrete experience to facilitate understanding. A child who, as a 3 year old has modeled a building from mud bricks, will have an organic sense of engineering and physics when she later designs structures in an architecture course.

• Older readers often appreciate having access to original texts and documents which give them an opportunity to come to their own conclusions about the information rather than relying on a secondhand point of view.

• Mentors are valuable resources and, although sometimes difficult to find, are well worth the effort. A mentor can provide the gifted/syntopical thinker with cutting-edge information, as well as an "intellectual peer" relationship that offers children opportunities to define themselves socially. Mentors should be chosen carefully. Many experts may not particularly like children, while others might be condescending. Parents and teachers need to be sure that mentors have a clear understanding of what each individual child needs, intellectually *and* emotionally. If a mentor is unavailable, try looking for peers through the internet. Chat groups, where an expert might be located for a long-distance correspondence, cover a wide variety of subject areas.

• Don't be surprised if your syntopical thinker abandons a long-cherished interest for something entirely new. Finding a new passion is common; sometimes these thinkers will appear to go "dormant," but they're usually thinking behind the scenes, even when it isn't obvious to the rest of us. Nothing to worry about, just keep the library card current, the concert tickets on hand, the museum subscriptions updated and get ready for the next revelation!

• Emotional support for syntopical thinkers is critical, especially in the early years when they're impatient with themselves, the material and with others. At this age they can be highly focused but lacking in experience and social graces. They may often require you to intercede with librarians, teachers, even grandparents, who don't understand their unique approach to learning.

I remember taking a submarine tour several years ago with my then-4-year old son. He answered every one of the group questions *for* the tour guide and added additional comments and corrections that, although fascinating, were not entirely welcome. By the end of the tour irritation was palpable; the adults were uncomfortable that this little boy was upstaging the "designated expert." It was clear that my son was in his element, knew what he was talking about and was thrilled to finally be seeing things he had read about and remembered. The negative reaction of other adults is one that parents and gifted/syntopical children experience regularly, but what kind of a message does it give all children about learning? Love it — but not too much! And never look smarter than the "expert."

Contemporary education presupposes a need to fit into a society that will remain static over the course of a 13-plus-year education. The more global our resources become, the more critical it is for us to recognize and foster the skills of syntopical thinkers. Their ability to take the immense technological advances of the past century and place them in the larger historical, cultural and spiritual context of human experience will be of paramount importance in the coming millennium.

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Gifted/Syntopical

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As parents and educators, it is our job to recognize syntopical thinkers in order to better create an environment in which these children can explore and learn while limiting their exposure to systems and methods that produce cynicism. In this way, we support them not only as learners, but as human beings. ❖

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Laura Goodman

One of Life's Little Oxymorons

Let's talk terminology. Recently, on three different occasions, I heard parents use the same exact phrase to describe their children: "My son/daughter is severely gifted," these loving parents said. Their voices were pitched low, all three of them, and their shoulders sagged. I know those sagging shoulders, but what about the low-pitched voices? Whenever I hear the stories of parents of gifted children, always I get a combined rush of empathy, elation, sympathy and understanding. But hearing a mom or dad's grave use of "severe" to modify the giftedness of a child stops me every time. It sounds so... pathological. Severely arthritic, maybe. Severely mauled. But severely gifted? I save "severely" for references to the sick and injured.

I mentioned this to a friend, a mother of a very gifted adolescent girl, and her first reaction was, "Why, oh why, do we have to think there's something *wrong* with being gifted? Why do we think it's immodest to talk about our kids having these wonderful minds?" Good questions.

Often, the words and tone of voice we use in describing them say things about how we and the culture in which we live view and accept these children. When someone asks about our kids' incredible abilities, why can't we joyfully say, "Oh, yes, Melinda is wildly and wonderfully gifted!" instead of, "Our Michael is horribly afflicted... I mean, gifted." Messages are flying everywhere, and these are smart kids, who hear much more in conversations than simple words.

My son was about 7 when he was smitten by the word and concept of an "oxymoron," and, since, he lives on the lookout for a good one. He finds them everywhere, in everything, stretching the concept to fit not just language use but occurrences in nature or in people's actions. A wild summer hail storm buried our lawn under three inches of white; "Oxymoron!" he called gaily, pointing out the front window. Same thing when he saw a photo of the 60-something mother and her brand new baby. I can't help but think he'd agree with me that there's one at work in a parent's referring to a child as severely gifted.

Now there's absolutely no denying how very difficult circumstances can become in the lives of and with these off-the-norm children. Because of our family's experiences, I'd be among the last to try to paint an always rosy picture of this life. But the fact remains that there's *nothing* pathological in or about intellectual gifts, however prodigious they may be. All children come to us as starter packages, including bodies ready to move and grow, with senses ready to explore and brains wired for learning about the world they've come into. Some come equipped for ultra speed and performance, whether that's physical or mental, others come with more standard operating equipment. It's not good or bad, sad or happy; it's just the way it is. Our perceptions of and references to these packages can make an enormous, if subtle, difference.

Within the context of a fully authentic life, one of meaning and worth,

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***Laura Goodman** is a fiction writer, editor and mother of a gifted child, not necessarily in that order.*

ParentSpace

Continued

what the gifted individual does with or makes of his or her potential is important. But because these are children, they need years of consistent, loving adult help and guidance in understanding themselves, their world and finding their place and function in it. Sometimes this help is overt — lots of talk and solid interaction, working on challenging situations as a family team, providing enrichment opportunities, arranging for acceleration or locating a school that better matches a child's needs. But we also need to pay more attention to the subtle ways we can help our children, and some of these have to do with how we perceive them, how we talk about them to others, how we influence others to think of them. Dropping modifiers such as "severely" from the list of those used to describe gifted children while looking on their gifts as a cause for celebration seems a terrific place to start. That would be doing everyone a favor, and there'd be nothing oxymoronic about it. ❖

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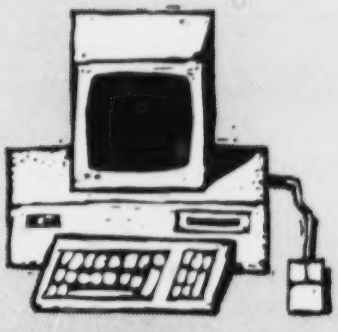

http://www.openspacecomm.com

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Surfing the Net

Sandra Berger

Gifted Students, the Internet and Science

Wow! I've been to Mars. Of course I didn't literally visit Mars, but the pictures of the Mars Pathfinder Mission are so realistic that it seemed like I could just reach out and touch the planet surface. The Mission has its own Internet site at *http://mpfwww.jpl.nasa.gov/*. To accommodate the great number of visitors, 23 "mirror sites" were created by corporations, academic institutions and organizations in different parts of the world. The 4 mirror sites created by corporations have each received 20 million "hits" each day--80 million computer connections to the Pathfinder site.

Visiting the Pathfinder Mission, you will find a host of links that provide detailed pictures and information. I was fascinated by the image of Sojourner making contact with the rock named Yogi. The rover's left rear wheel had driven up onto Yogi's surface in an attempt to get as close as possible. If you have some red/blue 3D glasses left over from the 60s, you can even see the panorama in 3D-movie style.

I just happened to visit the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum the day after I visited Mars on the Internet and went straight to the room that hosts the Pathfinder mission pictures. The Internet images are much better.

After your tour of the Pathfinder Mission, you might want to visit Spacelink, NASA's site, where you will find a wealth of material for curricula. The addresses are:

* web address: *http://spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov/.index.html*
* gopher address: *spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov*
* anonymous ftp address: *spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov*
* telnet address: *spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov*

The Internet has so many wonderful educational science sites that it would be impossible to list them in one column. So I'll give you some principal K-12 science sites that provide links to many others.

You can find an Internet glossary of terms at http://www.matisse.net/files/glossary.html. The glossary explains terms like "mirror site" and "hits."

Directory Sites

The *Understanding Our Gifted* column on mathematics [9(3), pp.26-28] described the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (ENC) *http://www.enc.org/*, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. If you've had time to visit, you discovered that the ENC provides lots of information on science. Be sure to look for "A Guide to Curiculum Development in Science."

Insanely Great Science Websites *http://www.eskimo.com/~billb/amateur/coolsci.html* was created by Bill Beaty and, along with a voluminously long list of science education sites, includes a list of neat stuff, like instructions for drawing holograms by hand and plans for very unconventional science projects. This site is for older students and requires parental supervision, but if you are interested in fractals, you will find a fractal microscopic here. My favorite link is "How Things Work: The Physics of Everyday Life." It works like a call-

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Surfing the Net

Continued

in radio show. Using one of the buttons, ask how something works and the site owner, Louis A. Bloomfield, Professor of Physics, The University of Virginia, will respond. If you've ever wondered how a neon light works, this is the place to ask. The URL is *http://www.phys.virginia.edu/Education/Teaching/HowThingsWork.* Note: At times the mailbox will be full.

The Internet has lots of web sites that respond to questions on science, although finding them can be quite a daunting task. There is a list at *http://www.halcyon.com/sciclub/kidquest.html.* The list of experts includes Shuttle Astronaut, Astronomer, Cardiologist, Chemist, Computer Scientist, Curator (Natural History, Zoology), Dentist, Dietician, Ecologist, Geologist, Horticulturist, Hydrologist, Medical Doctor, Immunologist, Meteorologist, Neurobiologist, Oceanographer, Paleontologist, Pharmacologist, Physical Scientist, Population Geneticist and Volcanologist. If you want to talk to more Geologists, use the U.S. Geological Survey Ask-A-Geologist *http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov:80/docs/ask-a-ge.html.*

My favorite question answering site is The Mad Scientist Network at Washington University Medical School in St. Louis, *http://medinfo.wustl.edu/~ysp/MSN/,* where a group of scientists covers many areas. During the past year they have received more than 7,000 questions; 18% were from students in grades kindergarten through 6. You can spend hours in the archives, where 2,500 answers have been stored (Note the tilde in the URL.).

"You Can--50 Questions" doesn't respond to questions, but there is a list of answers to questions on how things work in everyday life *http://www.nbn.com/youcan/questionlist.html.* Want to know why hair gets curly when the humidity goes up, or why the TV goes crazy when the mixer is turned on? This site is great for younger children. Jok Church, site owner, has a syndicated newspaper column that appears in the comics section where he answers questions like "Why do fingernails, hair and skin get soft in the water?" The questions that will be answered in the newspaper on specific dates are listed at *http://www.nbn.com/youcan/navigation/coming-up.html.* The site is hosted by Pitsco, where other "Ask the Expert" links reside *http://www.askanexpert.com/askanexpert/.*

Just for fun, try http://logos.it/query/query.html, the Logos Dictionary on the Internet that offers a universal translator for more than 30 languages. Type in a word in any language and you'll get a list of equivalents in other languages, including a phrase to put the original word in context.

The next stop on our tour is The Science Learning Network (SLN) *http://www.sln.org/,* a project funded by the National Science Foundation and Unisys Corporation. SLN is an alliance of six science museums supporting teacher development in science pedagogy. Links to the following museums are provided:

* The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia
  http://sln.fi.edu/
* The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, Portland
  http://www.omsi.edu/home.html
* The Exploratorium, San Francisco
  http://www.exploratorium.edu
* The Miami Museum of Science, Miami
  http://miamisci.org/
* The Science Museum of Mińnesota, St. Paul
  http://www.sci.mus.mn.us/
* The Museum of Science, Boston
  http://mos.org/

The Explorer *http://explorer.scrtec.org/explorer/* is a collection of educational resources (instructional software, lab activities and lesson plans)for K-12 science and mathematics education. You may browse through mathematics and science education curricula or conduct searches that focus on specific interests. The database includes natural science, life science, physical science and earth science. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) Star Schools provided initial funding for Explorer, which is being developed jointly by the Great Lakes Collaborative and the University of Kansas UNITE group to involve educators and students in creating and using multimedia resources for active learning.

Mathematics, Science, and Technology *http://tiger.coe.missouri.edu/mathsci.html* is maintained by the University of Missouri - Columbia College of Education. This site offers about 100 links to major math, science and technology resources. This directory site is comprehensive in the scope of its collection and conveniently orga-

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Surfing the Net

Continued

nized. (Visit the Bug Club *http://www.ex.ac.uk/bugclub/* to see all sorts of creepy crawlies.) Notable listings include:

* ERIC Clearinghouse on Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education
* Elementary Science This Month
* NASA - Comprehensive Links to NASA's Major Sites
* Nye Labs - Bill Nye the Science Guy
* Interactive Frog Dissection

If you have been reading this column and wondering how people use the Internet to adapt curriculum, visit "Tales from the Electronic Frontier" http://www.wested.org/tales/. In "Tales," 10 teachers share actual classroom experiences using the Internet in K-12 science and mathematics.

EDWeb K-12 Curriculum Links *http://badger.state.wi.us/agencies/dpi/www/WebEd.html* is a terrific resource for science links. This site is not very user-friendly, so use your browser's "find" command to locate "Science Assets." I found a link to the University of Washington Astronomy site *http://www-hpcc.astro.washington.edu/scied/astro/astroindex.html*, which offers curriculum resources and other written materials to assist in teaching or learning about astronomy and space science. (I guess I'm just hooked on space right now. When my three adult daughters were young, one of their favorite haunts was the local planetarium, and it left a permanent impression on all of us. I still love to look at the night sky.)

The final stop on our tour is Putnam Valley Schools in New York *http://putwest.boces.org/standards.html*. It's not exactly a science site, but rather host to links for education standards, including state science standards and the National Research Council's National Science Education Standards. All of the professional science associations are listed. Keep in mind that surfing the Internet is fun and informative, but one primary purpose is to find material for developing rigorous science curriculum that is based on important ideas, incorporates the latest information and uses technology. If you are homeschooling, or just want to know what the Standards offer to gifted students, visit the Putnam Valley site. To obtain the national science standards, contact:

National Science Education Standards
2101 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20418
URL: *http://www2.nas.edu/nas/21e.html*
URL: *http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/nses/html/*

That's all for now. Hope you get to visit Mars, and wave if you see me surfing. ❖

sberger@inet.ed.gov

The ideas expressed in this article are the author's, and do not necessarily represent the views of the CEC or ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education.

The URLs were accurate and working when last checked. The Internet is a dynamic place, and changes take place rapidly and without the server, the server might be temporarily down or the URL might have changed. Try again later or truncate the URL.

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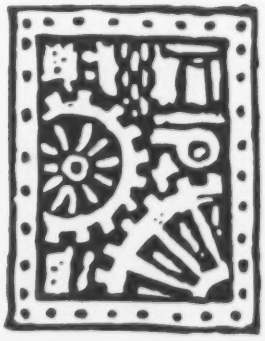
Creative Ventures

Jerry Flack

Happy Birthday, Cinderella!

Guess who celebrates her 300th birthday this year? If you guessed/answered that ever-popular young woman who overcomes hardship and adversity to meet and marry her Prince Charming, you can go to the head of the class. Yes, Cinderella turns 300 this year, but the basic Cinderella archetype character and story is much older than that.

"Cinderella" is thought to be the most popular fairy tale in the world and *is believed to be one of the oldest stories, too.* Storytellers have found references to Cinderella stories in writings as far back as the Roman historian Strabo in the first century B.C., as well as in Chinese manuscripts dating to the T'ang dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Most teachers and children, however, have their greatest familiarity with the French version by Charles Perrault, first published in 1797, and greatly popularized in the last couple of generations by the Disney animation film *Cinderella*, introduced in 1953.



Cinderella's Life Story (History)

Charles Perrault (1628-1703), a Paris intellectual with connections to the French royal court, became an influential member of the French Academy and served as its director for a time. His true greatness in life came in setting to paper the tales he told his own four children. He first published a collection of folktales, *Tales of Times Past*, in 1697. The book which is perhaps better known by its subtitle, *Tales of Mother Goose*, featured eight stories, including "Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper," "Sleeping Beauty," "The Master Cat, or Puss in Boots" and "Little Red Riding Hood." Although most of the tales had been told since at least the middle ages, Perrault did much more than just preserve them. He transformed these simple stories into tales of wonder and magic for children. The basic Cinderella story can be traced to the folklore of antiquity, but Perrault embellished the story with three original and significant details: the fairy godmother, the pumpkin coach and the glass slipper.

Creative Activities

I have found the classic story of Cinderella to be an extremely helpful and useful vehicle for applying and practicing newly learned creative thinking and problem solving skills. Fairy tales, and particularly Cinderella stories, provide safe and fertile ground for helping students practice the creative productive thinking skills of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. For example, students can brainstorm funny names for Cinderella's stepsisters as a fluency activity. The following prompts can be used both to celebrate Cinderella's birthday and to whet the appetites of students for creative engagement. The activities can be completed individually or in pairs or small groups.

*Conduct an imaginary interview with Cinderella before or after the ball. With a partner, videotape the interview for a special television broadcast.

*Keep a journal or diary that Cinderella or one of the other characters might have kept.

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Creative Ventures

Continued

*Create a unique version of "Cinderella" (e.g., a futuristic, Mars-based Cinderella who cannot attend an Intergalactic Ball).

*Imagine that Cinderella's fairy godmother is forgetful and cannot remember the words that help her transform pumpkins into coaches. Write a new "magic spell" for Cinderella's fairy godmother to recite.

*Create a board game, complete with rules and regulations, based upon story characters and elements found in Cinderella.

*Add mathematical measurements (e.g., miles to the castle, shoe sizes) to the telling of the classic Cinderella story, and then write a mathematical story problem based on Cinderella's adventures.

*Create a web or map noting the central characters in "Cinderella" and revealing the connections and relationships between and among the characters.

*Blind-folded, use molding clay to sculpt a magic slipper or a statue of any character from any Cinderella story.

*Create blueprints for a new castle for Cinderella and Prince Charming.

*Create a Cinderella rap, perhaps voicing Cinderella's view of her stepsisters. Choose background music and use rhythm instruments to accompany your new retelling of the story.

*Listen to music from Sergei Prokofiev's ballet "Cinderella," or Gioacchino Rossini's opera "La Cenerentola." With crayons and markers, draw pictures the selected music passages suggest.

*Choreograph a dance Cinderella and Prince Charming might perform. Teach the dance to the class.

*Pantomime scenes from any Cinderella story.

*Improvise a humorous scene from any of the many parodies of Cinderella, such as Babette Cole's *Prince Cinders* or Bernice Myers' *Sidney Rella*.

*Create a list of personality self-improvement tips for Cinderella's stepsisters.

*Analyze and discuss the lessons that can be learned from reading or listening to Cinderella stories (e.g., envy and cruelty are punished; selflessness and goodness are rewarded). Be sure to read *The Good Stepmother* by Marguerita Rudolph.

*Answer this question: "If you could be a fairy godperson, how would you help people improve their lives?"

*Imagine portraying either Yeh-Shen, Rhodopis, Prince Charming, Cinderlad or Cinderella. "What do you like or dislike about your role?"

*Have you ever felt like Cinderella or Sydney Rella?

In addition to practicing creative productive thinking skills, students can also engage in fun and imaginative problem solving activities. The following prompts allow students to play with and practice such complex tools as creative problem solving. Simultaneously, they also help to stimulate the creative thinking and imagination of young people. Students, individually or in cooperative learning groups, can explore and respond creatively to these Cinderella problem-solving explorations.

Fairy Godmothers On Strike!

So reads today's headline. All the fairy godmothers have gone on strike for higher wages. What is Cinderella to do? How can she go to the ball without the aid of a fairy godmother? If she is to overcome her adverse circumstances and fulfill her destiny as a princess, how can Cinderella go to the ball? Use your best creative problem-solving skills to think of a workable solution to rescue Cinderella.

Cinderella City Mall

You have a great task before you. As the nation's foremost architects, urban planners and developers, you need to conceive, design (draw a blueprint-type map) and build a scale model of the nation's first all-children's mall, Cinderella City. All the stores and activities and food venues should focus on the needs and likes of children, and the mall's theme should be based upon fairy tale titles, characters and events. Sample businesses may include: Rapunzel's Hair Care, Prince Charming's Formal Wear, Little Red Riding Hood's Candy Basket and Cinderella's Glass Slipper (a children's shoe store). Once all the stores have been brainstormed, you can build a scale model of the mall and even plan the grand opening celebration. For example, you might plan a "Midnight Madness" sale at Cinderella's Glass Slipper as part of a grand opening.

Inventing a Solution

Here is another Cinderella sans fairy godmother activity to test your inventive powers. Imagine that Cinderella's fairy godmother is at home, sick with the flu. She has aches and pains and a fever. There is no way she can get out of bed and come to Cinderella's rescue. Cinderella will have to rely on her own skills of invention (with your able help, of course). How might Cinderella combine the following items to fashion

- continued on next page

an invention that will transport her to the palace and the ball? You can also add anything else that might reasonably be at Cinderella's disposal.

1 large dog
1 yellow cat
6 feet of clothesline rope
5 gerbils
1 blue satin pillow
1 rusty wheelbarrow
1 red scarf
1 magazine *(Seventeen)*

Cinderella Resources

The basic Cinderella story of the child of ashes who rises to greatness because of her basic goodness and sweetness is found in cultures on almost every continent (even Antarctica if one considers Janet Perlman's delightful *Cinderella Penguin*). Many additional variants beyond Perrault's "Cinderella" exist. This variety makes it possible for parents and teachers to select several Cinderella stories to use with different groups of students, dependent upon such factors as the age of the readers or the desired culture they wish to accent. For example, older students will especially enjoy the British humor found in Babette Cole's tongue-in-cheek version, *Prince Cinders*. The marvelous diversity of Cinderella stories also underscores a vital tenet of education for creativity. Differences are to be celebrated, not evaluated as to which entity is better or worse. Perrault's French "Cinderella," the Egyptian "Rhodopis," the Chinese "Yeh-Shen" and the Irish "Cinderlad" are all superb fairy tales. Each exists as an equally valid story of wonder.

Cinderella and the Internet

Cinderella did not have a computer, modem or access to the World Wide Web in 1697, but today's children do, and there are at least two splendid web sites they can visit to learn more about Cinderella. The Children's Literature Web Guide is located at *http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/*. David K. Brown's site leads Internet users to new Cinderella stories written by students as well as collections of Cinderella books. Another outstanding web site is *http://www.lib.usm.edu/elref.html*. Browsers can access the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi. There, graduate library science students have located and scanned nearly 20 versions of Cinderella stories published 200 and 275 years past. An 1821 version from London, for example, can be easily located and printed on a home or classroom printer. In a matter of minutes, today's students can have in their hands facsimile copies of "Cinderella" that children read 200-300 years past.

Cinderella continues to age wonderfully. In 300 more years, she will no doubt be the ever-young heroine she remains today, and she'll still be enchanting readers, young and old. Happy Birthday, Cinderella! ❖

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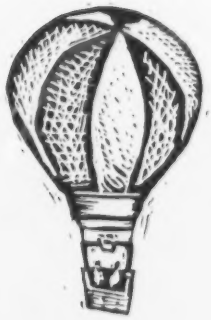
Above & Beyond

Susan Winebrenner

Gifted Students Learn Differently from Age Peers

The raging debate in the world of education regarding the need and desirability of "special programs" for gifted students misses a very important point. Whether or not separate "special" programs exist in your child's school, gifted students have the right to experience what all other students experience regularly: challenging learning opportunities which move eager minds beyond what they already know to experiences requiring effort and energy to understand and master. When it's necessary for adults to advocate for meeting the academic needs of their gifted children, it's important not to ask for anything "special." Parents always have the right, however, to ask any teacher regarding any student, "What evidence do you have that this child is working at his or her challenge level in your classroom?"

Almost every school in this country has something called a mission statement. Such a statement usually includes a sentence that goes something like, "All our students will actualize their learning to their highest potential." Parents always have the right to ask how this mission statement is being experienced by students whose natural ability demands exposure to accelerated content in order for them to "actualize their learning potential." Remembering that very few teachers in this country have any actual training in how to respond to the needs that gifted students' learning differences create, advocates may get better results when they ask for specific accommodations.



Gifted students actually learn differently from age peers in three important ways. First, they learn new material in much less time than age peers. Second, they tend to remember forever what they've already learned. Third, they perceive ideas and concepts at more abstract and complex levels than age peers.

These differences make "compacting" imperative. Compacting is the condensing of the regular curriculum and includes routine opportunities at the beginning of a learning unit for students to demonstrate previous mastery of the material to be taught. Two easy ways for compacting to occur are through simple pre-testing and a method which I call "Most Difficult First." These techniques are fair for all, since students are free to choose whether or not to take advantage of this opportunity.

To pre-test, teachers are asked to decide what method they will use to determine if all students are learning the designated content and offer the same method as a pre-assessment opportunity. Sometimes students demonstrate they know most of the expected content but do need instruction in certain concepts or lessons. In that case, they can participate directly in designated whole-class activities which focus on their areas of learning need. When the class is working in areas of the unit they've already mastered, these gifted students then can work on alternate, replacement activities.

This practice is called "differentiation." In my opinion, it's much more

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***Susan Winebrenner**, from Michigan, presents workshops on a variety of topics, but her first love is teaching gifted children. She is the author of Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom and Teaching Gifted Kids with Learning Disabilities in the Regular Classroom.*

appropriate than the practice of "extra credit." It doesn't take long for gifted kids to figure out that they'd better slow down or face having to do more than the regular amount of work. There are also students so driven to accomplish all the extra credit activities that they feel they've failed if they are not able to complete everything.

The "Most Difficult First" strategy is used when teachers assign a certain amount of practice work to the whole class. Students who can demonstrate their concept competency by doing the most difficult part of the assignment *first* are excused from the balance of the practice assignment to work on their differentiated activities.

When pre-testing isn't feasible, because the content is new for all students, teachers might use a study guide. This allows students in need of faster pacing to move through the basic content at their own speed and then spend the balance of their time developing a project related in some way to the content.

Many teachers freely acknowledge that highly capable learners probably need and benefit from compacting; however, some fear they won't know what to have these eligible students work on in the time created by compacting. Here's where parents can be very helpful. Be sure your child's teacher knows the topics about which your youngster exhibits enthusiastic interest at home. Sometimes, it's possible for a child to work on a project related to his/her area of passionate interest during the time for differentiated activities at school.

Gifted kids' learning differences are also apparent when cooperative learning is used in the classroom. These children can be bossy and impatient when they're placed in mixed-ability groups and expected to take a leadership or tutoring role. In several studies in which gifted students were interviewed about their attitude toward cooperative learning, it was apparent that they enjoyed it from time to time, as long as they didn't feel they were being taken advantage of in a group. Some gifted youngsters need just as much coaching and instruction as their age peers in how to exhibit and use social interactive skills. Often, the realization that they cannot do a certain highly challenging activity by themselves represents the only way for these kids to learn these valuable skills. When cooperative groups are working on skill-based activities, students who need to work on accelerated content should be grouped together — not because they're "gifted," but because they need to work on the same type of task. When cooperative groups are focusing on critical or divergent thinking activities, or on tasks that are open-ended enough for all students to work at their challenge level, mixed-ability cooperative groups can work just fine.

Another way in which gifted kids learn differently is their need for large chunks of time to work on a highly mesmerizing task or project. Short class periods and frequent movement from subject to subject are exceedingly frustrating for them. They may appear as though they aren't paying attention to the teacher's directions, when indeed they may be so focused on what they're doing that they literally don't hear the instructions. As a matter of fact, many gifted kids are labeled as having an attention deficit disorder for this very reason! The move in many districts to longer time blocks for learning will benefit many students, including highly capable learners.

Another difference that gifted kids experience is their constant battle to prove they're "okay," in order to gain acceptance from age peers. When you're comfortable with your age peers, your likelihood of being accepted and appreciated by them is high. When your mind operates like a person two to three years older than your chronological age, your comfort level with age peers may be compromised. It seems to me that when school curricula is concerned with "equity" and multicultural acceptance, we need to understand that gifted kids have the same need as all other humans to feel they're okay just the way they are, even if they're different from age peers in many ways. Tolerance for individual differences should extend to differences in learning ability as well.

Although heterogeneous grouping may work best for most types of learners, gifted students have different needs vis-a-vis grouping. In order to be validated for who they are and motivated to achieve, they must be purposefully grouped with at least several other students of similar ability in every classroom. In this way, gifted kids are more likely to be able to make friends with certain age peers, and they're more likely to select differentiated tasks if they have company with whom to work on those tasks. This practice is called "cluster grouping." An ERIC Digest (EDO-EC-95-1) called *Cluster Grouping of Gifted Students* may be downloaded through the Internet at *http://www.cec.sped.org/eric.htm* to give you information about this practice.

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Above and Beyond

Continued

When advocating for the different learning needs of gifted students, our efforts will be more successful if we know specifically what these kids need and make specific suggestions to teachers about how these differences may be accommodated in mixed-ability classes. Keep in mind that it is sometimes even more effective when we can "coach" our youngsters on how to make these requests themselves! When we accompany our requests with offers to help teachers in any way we can, our gifted students should be able to enjoy appropriate opportunites for challenging learning experiences on a regular basis.

Our office maintains a national network of districts that use cluster grouping for gifted students, and we can provide you with that list free of charge. Fax your request to me at (517) 592-3436. ❖

Aspectus

The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling. James Hillman. New York: Random House, 1996. 23.00, ISBN 679-44522-6, 224 pp.

> *To protect the genius we must protect the story in which the genius can live, else it might take its invisibility literally, grow silent, and disappear for fear of being reduced to mediocrity.* (p.189)

At some point in the past 50 years, technology edged out the word destiny; a word that has, for centuries, helped us define the unique nature of genius and calling. In his book, *The Soul's Code*, author James Hillman argues this word right back into the lexicon with inspiration and authority.

Hillman uses examples of gifted individuals from many walks of life and periods of history to examine what propelled them to greatness. He asks us to "...look at these stories of those whose flame blazed and whose genius flowered..." to glimpse the potential realized by those who successfully answer their life calling.

Through his extensive examination of genius, Hillman arrives at a simple observation, "What matters is passion." Passion that must be answered by the individual even as the rest of the world labels it obsessive and unusual. Some marvelous examples of how driven those in service to their calling can be will provide ample comparison for parents and teachers of gifted children. Through the childhood experiences of many including John Stuart Mill and Francis Galton himself, the argument that giftedness might be the work of answering destiny is well made.

Readers confused by gifted children whose feats of brilliance are interspersed with more ordinary behavior, will find Hillman's section on "Names and Nicknames" provocative, as he asks, "Does the genius have one name and the person another?"

Although Hillman's book is not solely about the gifted, it does supply an intriguing explanation for many of the questions raised by those who live and work with them. By turning contemporary psychology on its ear, Hillman is sure to stir up new ways of viewing giftedness, parenting, education and ...destiny. ❖

C.R.

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The Bulletin Board

Interact!

....a forum for discussion of what is important in the lives of gifted children and those who live and work with them. Share your views and opinions, your successes and frustrations, your expertise and your dreams.

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The word advocacy has always seemed to me to have no connection to education or children. As a classroom teacher I've always felt that my primary role is to support, protect, enhance, teach and love children....I've never needed a word to explain that role. Now as a parent of children--highly gifted children, I might add--my wife and I are continually reminded that we must be their active advocates if we want effective education to occur. I must be naive because I have assumed that such support and love begins in the home and naturally flows over to the school when we entrust our children to their teachers. Do we need a formal word for that? Why wouldn't effective education occur? Why must I become an active advocate?

GKDL
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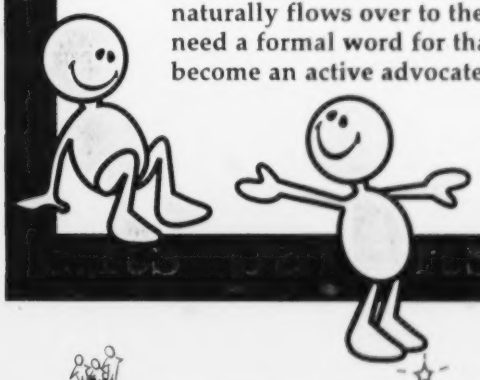

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